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The Importance of a Room of Her Own: Female Spacial Awareness in Selected American Women´s Fiction

Vlastní pokoj: ženské vnímání prostoru ve vybraných dílech amerických autorek

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Bc. Jitka Hanžlová

Vedoucí diplomové práce (Supervisor):

Mgr. Pavla Veselá, Ph.D.

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V Praze dne …….

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

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1. Introduction

The following thesis deals primarily with the works of four American women writers coming from different historical, social and cultural backgrounds: Charlotte Perkins Gilman´s and Kate Chopin´s short stories "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Storm," Louise Erdrich´s novel *Love Medicine* and Sandra Cisneros´s novella *The House on Mango Street*, focusing on the main female characters and their special relations to the places they inhabit. The aim of this thesis is to compare and contrast these works in order to analyze the way spatial imagery reflects upon and responds to the female figures´ psychological, social and cultural situation. Specifically, it will be suggested that in the above mentioned works, the house a woman lives in can be for her either a place of confinement and oppression subject to male authority or a space in which she can feel free and safe; that is to say, a space she sees as her own.

1.1 Space and Literature

As the literary theorists Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga argue, "space, like time, is never neutral, never critically transparent, and its artistic representation is always intentional, dialectical and culturally embedded."[1] In other words, space is always charged with some energy, be it positive or negative, which is, in turn, reflected in the portrayal of the space. However, according to Phillip Wegner, the notion of space as "both a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of being human in the

[1] Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga, "Introduction," *Spatial Practices: An Interdisciplinary Series in Cultural History, Geography and Literature, Volume 4: Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008) 19.

world"[2] has replaced the prevailing "Enlightenment and Cartesian notion of space as an objective homogenous extension, distinct from the subject, and the Kantian concept of space as an empty container in which human activities unfold"[3] only in the last twenty-five years. One of the texts that has inspired this shift in the perception of space in literary theory and criticism (from the phase when it was seen simply as a setting without any consequence for the meaning of a literary work to the phase when it is regarded as playing a part equal to that of characters and plot) is Gaston Bachelard´s book *The Poetics of Space*.

In his phenomenological observation of domestic space Bachelard quotes Rainer Maria Rilke, who claims that "through every human being, unique space, intimate space opens up to the world."[4] This statement nicely illustrates Bachelard´s conviction that the place we inhabit is never empty; it is never neutral because it is shaped and transformed by our thoughts, memories, dreams and emotions: "Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space […]. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. […] The sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter."[5] This process of appropriating the space as our own has an impact on our perception of domestic space as something special: "Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home […]."[6] Nevertheless, Bachelard asserts, the relationship between dwellers and their dwelling is reciprocal: "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer; the house allows one to dream in peace. [… It] is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind."[7] That domestic space can be seen not only as a production shaped by its inhabitants but also as a

[2] Phillip Wegner, "Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, Place and Textuality," *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 181.
[3] Wegner, 181.
[4] *Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 202.
[5] Bachelard, xxxvi, 5.
[6] Bachelard, 6.
[7] Bachelard, 6.

force that is in turn shaping them is also obvious from Ellen Eve Frank´s comment made in her book about "literary architecture:" "our experience as an activity of being – entering and moving through interior space, seeing wall-boundaries, looking through windows, feeling stress – is governed by and utilizes the architectural structures we perceive, as we perceive them."[8] As we will see, Bachelard´s and Frank´s general notions of domestic space are in keeping with what Marilyn R. Chandler has found out about houses in American fiction.

Chandler argues that houses in American novels do not represent mere settings; they may be seen as "powerful, value-laden, animated agents of fate looming in the foreground, not the background, of human action; [these] novels are about houses and homes as much as they are about the people who inhabit them."[9] According to Chandler, the omnipresence of houses in American fiction may be seen as a result of the fact that in America, "the business of settlement and 'development,' the issue of how to stake out territory, clear it, cultivate it, and build on it has been of major economic, political, and psychological consequence."[10] Therefore, Monika Kaup claims, "the home is more than just a shelter; it is a national institution almost as sacred as the American flag. In home ownership, the American Dream and the American Way are manifest: the civic values of individualism, economic success, and self-sufficiency."[11] In other words, American fiction utilizes the image of the house to emphasize and enhance the country´s national identity and values.

What is more, Chandler continues, "American writers have generally portrayed the structures an individual inhabits as bearing a direct relationship or resemblance to the structure of his or her psyche and inner life and as constituting a concrete manifestation of

[8] Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition: Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 4-5.
[9] Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 1.
[10] Chandler, 1.
[11] Monika Kaup, "The Architecture of Ethnicity in Chicano Literature," *American Literature*, Vol. 69, No. 2, June 1997: 361.

specific values. The house is frequently treated as a schematic reiteration of the character of the central figure in a story."[12] In addition, Chandler points out, American writers can be said to have repeatedly used metaphors of houses to illustrate their idea of a text as something that can be best understood in spatial terms. Consequently, "the houses in their novels reflect not only the psychological structure of the main character or the social structures in which he or she is entrapped but the structure of the text itself, thereby setting up a four-way, and ultimately self-referential, analogy among writer, text, character, and house."[13] Having established the way domestic space is perceived and portrayed in general, attention will now be paid to the difference between male and female spatial awareness.

1.2 Male and Female Spatial Awareness

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, Ashlyn K. Kuersten explains, the so-called "Separate Spheres Doctrine" emerged as a distinct ideology in Europe and North America. This ideology was based on a distinction between "a male sphere that was public – one concerned with the regulated world of government, trade, business, and law, from which women were largely excluded – and a women´s sphere that was private – encompassing the unregulated realm of home, family, and child rearing."[14] Of course, geographers Mona Domosh and Joni K. Seager assert, in the early capitalist period, many families could not be organized according to this stereotype since "many women of the working and middle class toiled for wages because their families required the income."[15] Still, Domosh and Seager continue, "even though many members of the working and middle classes couldn´t afford the luxury of having only one wage earner in the family, they were not immune from the powerful ideology

[12] Chandler, 10.
[13] Chandler, 2-3.
[14] Ashlyn K. Kuersten, *Women and the Law: Leaders, Cases and Documents* (ABC-CLIO, 2003) 16-17.
[15] Mona Domosh and Joni K. Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001) 4.

that separated the male world of work and the female world of home and family."[16] The "Separate Sphere Doctrine" was complemented by what the historian Barbara Welter called "The Cult of True Womanhood," addressing the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity: "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."[17] The difference between the world of the supposedly obedient and submissive women whose proper place was deemed to be inside their husband´s house, and the allegedly hard-working and public-oriented men´s world is also captured in the literary descriptions of women´s and men´s relationship to the space they occupy.

Houses in American fiction written towards the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century serve as their male inhabitants´ status symbols; the male characters do not seem to feel any intimacy towards their houses, they are merely interested in what the houses say about them in terms of social and economical success. Christopher Newman, the hero of Henry James´s 1877 novel *The American*, for instance, purchased his apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann "in accordance with [his friend´s] estimate of what he called [Newman´s] social position."[18] To suit Newman´s social position, the first floor apartment "consisted of a series of rooms, gilded from floor to ceiling a foot thick, draped in various light shades of satin, and chiefly furnished with mirrors and clocks."[19] Similarly, the titular character of W. D. Howells´s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) decides to build a new house in the fashionable Beacon Hill neighborhood merely to gain acceptance into the upper levels of Boston society. As we will see in the chapter dedicated to Kate Chopin, Léonce Pontellier, one of the characters of Chopin´s 1899 novel *The Awakening*, cherishes his

[16] Domosh and Seager, 4.
[17] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Summer 1966: 152.
[18] Henry James, *The American* (The Floating Press, 2011) 100.
[19] James, 100.

lavishly furnished house because it delineates his place in the world and serves as a symbol of his success. Finally, Jay Gatsby, the hero of F. Scott Fitzgerald´s 1925 novel, buys his "colossal" mansion, "a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool"[20] with only one aim in mind: to impress "the king's daughter, the golden girl"[21] Daisy Buchanan whose "voice is full of money."[22] Therefore, it can be said that the male characters in these works have a tendency to regard their houses as mere tokens of their success. The female characters, on the other hand, tend to have a more emotional relationship to their house.

The intimacy of women´s relationship to their living space was famously asserted by Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One´s Own*:

> One goes into the room – but the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before a woman could say what happens when she goes into a room. [...] One has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one´s face. How should it be otherwise? For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force [...].[23]

Women were supposed to find fulfillment in their homes, having little opportunity to participate in public life; hence, it was usually women who furnished houses and rooms, who knew where every little thing was, who tidied and cleaned every corner, and thus, as Bachelard asserts, gave their homes life: "The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep. […] The house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only

[20] Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Interactive Media, 2012) 12.
[21] Fitzgerald, 97.
[22] Fitzgerald, 97.
[23] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One´s Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965) 87.

know how to build a house from the outside […].”[24] Therefore, it can be said that in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, most women developed a strong attachment to the space they occupied.

Nonetheless, although important cultural, social, economical and legal changes concerning the status of women in Western civilization have taken place, the relationship of women towards the space they live in does not seem to be significantly altered nowadays, as an interview with Toni Morrison suggests. In her conversation with Robert Stepto, Morrison speaks about “a woman´s strong sense of being in a room, a place, or in a house:”

> Sometimes my relationship to things in a house would be a little different from, say my brother´s or my father´s or my sons´. I clean them and I move them and I do very intimate things ‘in place:’ I am sort of rooted in it, so that writing about being in a room looking out, or being in a world looking out, or living in a small definite place, is probably very common among most women anyway.[25]

Similarly, Domosh and Seager in their 2001 study *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* claim that for women, there seems to be “some intangible connection to self and identity” associated with their homes. Indeed, they argue, “geographers Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt (1995) found in their study in Worcester, Massachusetts, that women almost always live closer to their place of work than men do, no matter if they are married or single, have or do not have children.”[26] “Men may take pride in the greenness of their lawn or in the barbecue grill in the backyard,” Domosh and Seager say, “but for the most part it is women´s identities and women´s interests that are bound up with the idea of, and the literal form of, the home.”[27] Also, considering for example Alice Walker´s *The Color Purple* (1982), or the works of Cisneros and Erdrich that will be discussed in this

[24] Bachelard, 68.
[25] Toni Morrison and Robert Stepto, “‘Intimate Things in Place:’ A Conversation with Toni Morrison,” *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 18, No. 3, Autumn 1977: 473.
[26] Domosh and Seager, 2.
[27] Domosh and Seager, 2.

thesis, it may be argued that women continue to have more intimate relationships to their living space than men, who tend to be more concentrated on the public sphere.

Accordingly, home has traditionally been considered to be feminine, as Olivier Marc implies: "to build a house is to create an area of peace, calm and security, a replica of our mother´s womb, where we can leave the world and listen to our own rhythm; it is to create a place of our very own, safe from danger."[28] Marc´s idea of home corresponds to Bachelard´s notion of domestic space as a *felicitous space*, as a space we love and in which we feel secure and sheltered; it is a space that "gives mankind proofs of illusions of stability."[29] At the same time, Nancy Duncan asserts, "the home which is usually thought to be gendered feminine has also traditionally been subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father."[30] In other words, the house, conventionally owned by men, has often been portrayed as a place of female confinement and oppression. Hence, the image of a house may be said to embrace the dichotomy of a house as a shelter and refuge on the one hand and a trap on the other.

1.3 The House as a Symbol of Women´s Confinement

In the preface to their influential feminist analysis of the works of selected nineteenth and twentieth century women writers *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar tell us that having read such geographically, historically and psychologically varied authors as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, they were astonished, among other things, by the recurrence of the images of enclosure and escape:

> Both in life and in art, we saw, the artists we studied were literally and figuratively confined. Enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society,

[28] *Olivier Marc: Psychology of the House*, trans. Jessie Wood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) 14.
[29] Bachelard, 17.
[30] Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces," *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996) 131.

> these literary women were also, inevitably, trapped in the specifically literary constructs of what Gertrude Stein was to call "patriarchal poetry." For not only did a nineteenth-century woman writer have to inhabit ancestral mansions (or cottages) owned and built by men, she was also constricted and restricted by the Palaces of Art and Houses of Fiction male writers authored.[31]

In other words, the recurrent images of confinement within patriarchal houses can be seen as stemming from the women writers´ feeling that they were imprisoned within the structures of patriarchal society – both figuratively and literally.

First of all, attention will be paid to women´s inscription within men´s "Houses of Fiction." Not allowed to speak for themselves, Gilbert and Gubar explain, women in patriarchal societies have been diminished to mere properties, mere constructs imprisoned in male texts: "From Eve, Minerva, Sophia and Galatea onward, after all, patriarchal mythology defines women as created by, from and for men, the children of male brains, ribs and ingenuity."[32] Recalling famous fictitious women, Woolf argues that "all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen´s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex."[33] What is more, Woolf asserts, having no substantial female literary tradition behind her, a woman writer was forced to draw upon male literary values, patterns and structures; however, "the weight, the pace, the stride of a man´s mind [were] too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully."[34] As a result, Gilbert and Gubar conclude, a woman writer "must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her. Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority […], they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person […] which

[31] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Preface," *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) xi.
[32] Gilbert and Gubar, 3-12.
[33] Woolf, 82.
[34] Woolf, 76.

[…] drastically conflict with her own sense of her self […].”[35] Subsequently, the above mentioned recurrent images of enclosure and escape might be said to originate in the women writers´ feeling that they could not create and express themselves freely because they were constantly limited and suffocated in being forced to inhabit the space of patriarchal texts.

Simultaneously, the source of the images of confinement can be traced back to the women writers´ experience as daughters, wives and sisters living in patriarchal society. In the Victorian period, the “Separate Spheres Doctrine” was enforced by “the common law doctrine of coverture” that, as Cynthia A. Kierner explains, “assumed that women were weak and irrational and thus best represented in the public sphere by their fathers, husbands, and brothers.”[36] Under coverture, Kierner says, a married woman´s legal status was virtually non-existent: “as a wife, she was a *feme covert*, having no legal identity apart from that of her husband. Consequently, she could not control property, sign contracts, file suit in court, or control her own earnings.”[37] If a woman was not married, Kuersten writes, “her father or other male relative was her ‘legal’ identity.”[38] As a result, women were not only kept indoors and discouraged from taking part in public affairs, but they were also denied fundamental political rights; instead, they were represented in all legal, political and economical transactions by men. As Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate, women authors tended to express their frustration and despair over the position of women in patriarchal society in spatial terms:

> From Ann Radcliffe´s dungeons to Jane Austen´s mirrored parlors, from Charlotte Bronte´s haunted garrets to Emily Bronte´s coffin-shaped beds, imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer´s own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places. […] the imagery of entrapment

[35] Gilbert and Gubar, 48-9.
[36] Cynthia A. Kierner, “Introduction,” *Charles Brockden Brown: Alcuin: A Dialogue in Utopia* (Albany: New York College and University Press, Inc., 1995) 12.
[37] Kierner, 13.
[38] Kuersten, 17.

> expresses the woman writer´s sense that she has been dispossessed precisely because she is so thoroughly possessed – and possessed in every sense of the word.[39]

Hence, the suffocating rooms and houses constantly reappearing in women writers´ fiction may be said to reflect both their metaphorical imprisonment within the houses of patriarchal texts and the quite literal confinement within their fathers´ and husbands´ houses.

One of the most profound comments on female imprisonment, both figurative and literal, in American fiction is represented by Charlotte P. Gilman´s 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" that will be analyzed in this thesis. Gilman´s heroine is forced to stay in a room that is not her own, and that, having bars in the windows, resembles a prison. The house itself is a secluded country estate: a hereditary possession that has belonged to a long line of male proprietors. On the pages of the narrator´s secret journal, the house and room with its furnishings serve as projections of her confinement, oppression and isolation. The most significant, and also most ambiguous of these spatial images, is the wallpaper that the narrator tears down. The narrator´s attacks on the wallpaper can be interpreted as an attempt to defy patriarchal domination, gain a space of her own, and thus achieve freedom and independence.

Nonetheless, as much as women´s confinement seems to be restricted within the limits of the nineteenth century, Sandra Cisneros´s 1984 novella *The House on Mango Street* provokes us with the suggestion that female entrapment is present also in the twentieth century. Cisneros´s heroine, a young girl growing up in a Chicago Chicano/a community, tells us about the women in her neighborhood who are trapped inside their homes by their husbands and other relatives. She tells us about their sadness, wasted talents and unfulfilled dreams. These women have a place in which they can live; yet, this place is not their own. This is something that Esperanza realizes and expresses in her wish to have her own house: a house in which nobody would tell her what she should or should not do, a house in which she

[39] Gilbert and Gubar, 83-4.

can be free, in which she can create and write. Esperanza´s house would be a space she loves, a space in which she can feel safe and sheltered; in other words, it would be a *felicitous space*.

1.4 Domestic Space as a *Felicitous Space*

As we have seen, a number of female writers, as well as literary critics, especially feminist ones, have traditionally paid attention to the depiction of domestic space as a scene of female confinement and oppression. Yet, if we are to thoroughly examine the ways women´s personalities are created in relations to their homes, it is also necessary to concentrate on the portrayals of domestic space as a *felicitous space*. After all, as Gómez Reus and Usandizaga remind us, "Virginia Woolf has persuasively argued [that] personal freedom and emancipation for women would need to begin with the conquest of the private room. Domesticity does not of necessity imply privacy, nor does it automatically signify a lack of agency."[40] Indeed, considering the fact that women have usually more intimate relations to their homes than men do, a domestic space that is perceived as a felicitous one by a woman can surely be seen as one of the means of her empowerment.

As Sutton-Ramspeck claims, the importance of being in charge of one´s household for a woman´s empowerment is evident from Gilman´s works: "when women characters cannot or will not design their own living space in ways comfortable to them, the results are nearly always bad. On the other hand, to take charge of one´s home décor is linked to a broader sense of empowerment."[41] Similarly, Ann Heilmann observes that in the works of the New Women writers she has studied (Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Mona Caird and Olive

[40] Gómez Reus and Usandizaga, 30.

[41] Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Ohio University Press, 2004) 108. [In *Herland*, for instance, when the male explorers arrive to the all-female utopian society, they notice that "everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all" (*Herland*, 37). Similarly, in Herland, each citizen has her own room, bath and receiving room; subsequently, Herlanders possess "the highest, keenest, most delicate sense of personal privacy" (*Herland*, 222).]

Schreiner, for instance), having a room of one´s own is an essential prerequisite for the women characters´ success in the public sphere, for "if as a result of parental interference or romantic attachments, they exchange their rooms (signifying independence) for domesticity and marriage, they almost inevitably lose their foothold in public life."[42]

The importance of having a space of one´s own is even more emphasized in American culture where, as I have already mentioned, drawing on Chandler´s research, one´s identity and social status are defined by where one lives: "The American Dream still expresses itself in the hope of owning a freestanding single-family dwelling, which to many remains the most significant measure of the cultural enfranchisement that comes with being an independent, self-sufficient individual."[43] This valorization of having a space of one´s own may be seen in Edith Wharton´s 1905 novel *The House of Mirth*. When Lily enters Selden´s flat, she exclaims: "How delicious to have a place like this all to one´s self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman."[44] When Selden replies that there are women who have a place on their own, one of them being his cousin, Lily contrasts their situations: "She likes being good, and I like being happy. And besides, she is free and I am not. It must be pure bliss to arrange the furniture just as one likes. If I could only do over my aunt´s drawing-room I should be a better woman."[45] Although Miss Farish owns only "a horrid little place,"[46] she is seen as being free. Gerty may be poor and shabby, but, unlike Lily, she did not have to "sell" herself in order to have a room of her own, which gives her the strength to retain her moral integrity and independence. Another female character, who is able to appropriate a space for herself within the structures of patriarchal society, is the heroine of Kate Chopin´s 1898 story "The Storm."

[42] Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (New York: St. Martin´s, 2000) 178.
[43] Chandler, 1-2.
[44] Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (London: Electric Book, Co., 2001) 16.
[45] Wharton, 17.
[46] Wharton, 16.

Calixta is a perfect housewife who has everything under control; clearly, the household is her domain. Yet, she can also be passionate and spontaneous, which implies that she feels comfortable at her home. She is able to embrace and express her sexuality, which is something unheard-of at the time in which the story was written. Moreover, the adultery, committed under her husband´s roof, may be seen as an act of a strong, confident woman who is not afraid to confront the conventions of society. Thus, it can be said that although Calixta does not legally own the house she inhabits, she claims its ownership through her actions.

In Louise Erdrich´s 1984 novel *Love Medicine*, which deals with a small group of Native Americans living on an Indian reservation, one can find two powerful and independent women – Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Lamartine. The strength of both these women, the novel´s most prominent mother figures, can be said to stem from their being firmly set in their households. Unlike most of the men and some of the women on the reservation, Marie and Lulu know where their home is and they fight courageously to defend and preserve it.

In sum, this thesis will demonstrate that the depiction of domestic space in American fiction plays an important role in mirroring characters´ internal and external life. This is even more significant in the case of female characters, who, as a result of various historical, social and cultural conditions, tend to be more oriented at private sphere. A woman´s living space can be either suffocating and oppressive or safe and happy, depending on whether a woman can call it her home or just a place in which she stays because she has nowhere else to go. It will be argued that a woman´s relationship to a place she inhabits is essential for the development of her personality. Furthermore, the comparison of the female characters from the works written in the time span of a century by authors from different cultural backgrounds will suggest that this relationship, in spite of broader cultural and social shifts, perhaps, has not significantly changed.

2. Charlotte Perkins Gilman´s "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Charlotte P. Gilman´s 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" is doubtlessly one of the most impressive representations of late Victorian women´s confinements, both actual and metaphorical, within the structures of patriarchal society. In the following analysis, attention is going to be paid mainly to the ways spatial setting (the house and the attic room with its furnishings and especially with the yellow wallpaper) is used to comment not only on the concrete situation of the story´s narrator, but also on the general situation of many late nineteenth-century women. Besides, the importance of having a healthy and intimate relationship towards the space one inhabits, particularly if one is a woman, will be discussed.

2.1 The House

As a part of her cure, the narrator is forced to stay in a large manor house with a long history: a hereditary possession that has surely been owned by a long line of male "heirs and co-heirs."[47] As such, the house can be said to represent the narrator´s immersion in patriarchy: "The heroine has been taken back in time by her physician-husband," Elizabeth Ammons writes, "forcibly carried away from modern, urban America to 'ancestral halls,' a 'colonial mansion' a 'hereditary estate.' There, in a 'haunted house' 'long untenanted' that perfectly symbolizes the repressive Victorian 'separate sphere' to which she is being returned, the narrator is held prisoner […]."[48] The narrator is held prisoner in the epitome of patriarchal architecture – built and owned by men – by a combined authority of three men in her life.

[47] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," *New England Magazine* Vol. 11, Issue 5, Jan. 1892: 648. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

[48] Elizabeth Ammons, "Writing Silence: 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 36-7.

These three men, who imposed the treatment upon her, were her physician-husband John, her brother (also a doctor), and Weir Mitchell, a man that scares her because "he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (650). The rest cure, to which the narrator is exposed, is surely not dissimilar to that prescribed to the author of the story who had been diagnosed by S. Weir Mitchell as suffering from a variation of "nervous prostration" or "neurasthenia." According to John S. Bak, Mitchell´s rest cure treatment included "locking Gilman away in his Philadelphia sanitarium for a month, enforcing strict isolation, limiting intellectual stimulation to two hours a day, and forbidding her to touch pen, pencil or paintbrush ever again."[49] In the story, the cure is enforced by the narrator´s husband, who is the most pronounced representative of patriarchal oppression here.

John is, as Karen Ford observes, "identified in relation to the patriarchy first and in relation to his wife only afterwards:"[50] he is "a physician of high standing and one´s own husband" (648). John´s authority is double - he is a doctor and a husband: "I am a doctor, dear, and I know" (652) - and is firmly rooted in the structure of the society governed by men. He patronizingly calls his wife a "blessed little goose" (649), and does not pay attention to any of her opinions or wishes. She is his "little girl" (652), who is supposed to "take care of [herself] for his sake" (652). He often laughs at her, the narrator tells us, but that is only what "one expects in marriage" (647). Indeed, at the beginning of the story, Marilyn R. Chandler claims, the narrator "presents herself as a submissive, compliant, affectionate wife who aims to please her husband and is attempting to follow her doctor's orders for recovering from a 'condition' that seems to be postpartum depression."[51] Ironically, Loralee MacPike argues,

[49] John S. Bak, "Escaping the Jaundiced Eye: Foucauldian Panopticism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman´s 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 31:1, Winter 1994: 39.
[50] Karen Ford, "'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Women´s Discourse," *Tulsa Studies in Women´s Literature* Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 1985: 309-310.
[51] Marilyn R. Chandler, "*The Awakening* and 'The Yellow Wallpaper:' Ironies of Independence," *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 140.

the "recovery" she is working so hard to achieve under the rest cure, means to "appear as a normal female in a world created by and for men."[52] In other words, the narrator is forced to endure the conditions of the rest cure imposed upon her by the men around her in order to become what these men desire her to be. What is more, Paula A. Treichler points out, the rest cure seems to be "enforced by the 'ancestral halls' themselves: the rules are followed even when the physician-husband is absent."[53] In this way, the house can be said to stand for the main heroine´s forced submission to male dictum, embodied in the form of medical diagnosis.

At the same time, the house may be read as a reflection of the narrator´s psyche. "The house and the woman are the dual focus of the story," Chandler argues, "the woman's body, like the house, imprisoning a restless spirit that has long been undernourished."[54] According to Chandler, the analogy is implied at the beginning of the story by the narrator herself, "who realizes that translating her concerns about her body into concerns about the house is the only way in which she is going to be allowed to give them expression:"[55] "So I will let it alone and talk about the house. […] It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. […] There are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people" (648). The house is isolated; standing quite alone, far away from other dwellings. That the house is secluded is further evident from the narrator´s comment that they will "take the boat home to-morrow" (656), which suggests that the house is situated on an island, peninsula or on the other bank of a river. Consequently, Chandler states, the resemblance between the house and the narrator lies in the fact that they are both "isolated, complicated, confined, ensconced in a luxurious private domain but having little

[52] Loralee MacPike, "Environment as Psychopathological Symbolism in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 8.3, Summer 1975: 286.
[53] Paula A Treichler, "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Tulsa Studies in Women´s Literature* Vol.3, No. ½, Spring – Fall 1984: 69.
[54] Chandler, 140.
[55] Chandler, 140.

relation to the larger world."[56] Yet, in spite of the above mentioned resemblance between the house and the narrator, the narrator´s relationship to the house is painfully distorted.

Although the heroine is denied access to the realm of public life, and is, instead, confined to the private sphere, she is not allowed to perform the duties that are traditionally connected with it: "It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way! I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already! […] Jennie sees to everything now" (649). Another woman, her husband´s sister, is in charge of the household: the narrator does not have any responsibilities, no outlet for her creativity. Therefore, her relationship to the house is deformed because she does not feel any intimacy toward the house; it is not her home.

2.2 The Garden

Further, the restrictions and limits of patriarchal society imposed upon the narrator can be said to be mirrored in the space of the garden surrounding the house with its "hedges and walls and gates that lock" (648). The enclosed area of the garden can be interpreted as a trope reflecting upon the heroine´s confinement. "So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal" (650), the narrator tells us, thus delineating the boundaries of her shrunken world. She is not allowed to transgress the boundaries of this cautiously cultivated and confined space; she can only watch the woman liberated from the wallpaper creeping "away off in the open country" (655). Thus, the limited world of the garden is contrasted with the open country that is seen as a place of freedom.

At the same time, an analogy can be discerned between the garden´s and the main character´s destiny. "There were greenhouses, too," the narrator tells us as she describes the beauty of the garden, "but they are all broken now," she continues, "there was some legal

[56] Chandler, 140.

trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and coheirs" (648). Symbolically, the growth of the plants and flowers in the greenhouses seems to be shattered as a result of a power-struggle over the house among, presumably, male inheritors, just as the personal development and even sanity of the narrator is infringed upon by men´s attempt to control her life.

2.3 The Room

The room the narrator has to stay in can function as still another memento of her subordination to a man´s will: her wish to stay in the manifestly feminine downstairs bedroom is rejected by her husband, and instead, she is forced to stay in a room she does not like and that reminds her of a "boys´ school" (648). "I don´t like our room a bit," the narrator writes, "I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it" (648). When she complains about the wallpaper, John refuses to remove it although he knows how much it annoys his wife: "He said that after the wall-paper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on" (649). (Tellingly, the items enumerated by John serve as vivid symbols of the oppression and confinement the narrator is subject to. It is surely no coincidence that John does not desire to remove them.) As Heather Kirk Thomas writes, John´s unwillingness to take into consideration any of the narrator´s wishes concerning domestic matters reveals that "he sees himself as the man of the house, a forceful, if tender, comptroller."[57] The narrator´s lack of control over the choice of the room or its furnishings may then be read as signifying the

[57] Heather Kirk Thomas, "'[A] Kind of Debased Romanesque with Delirium Tremens:' Late-Victorian Wall Coverings and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Catherine J. Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000) 189-206.

diminishment of her territory within woman´s traditional sphere, caused by her husband´s effort to spatially define and confine her life.

Moreover, John insists on sharing the room with his wife; he stays with her whenever he wants to, no matter what her wishes are. Besides, she is being supervised by Jennie, whose duty is to answer "a lot of professional questions" (655) about her asked by John. That the narrator´s privacy is constantly invaded by other members of the household is obvious from the abrupt endings of her journal entries: "There comes John, and I must put this away" (649), writes the narrator at the end of her first entry; the next one ends because John´s sister is coming: "There´s sister on the stairs!" (650). The narrator does not have a place that she can call her own: she has to stay in a room chosen for her by her husband, and she does not like it, nor has any privacy there.

2.4 The *Attic* Room

Symbolically, the room Gilman´s heroine is confined to is a room "at the top of the house" (648); that is to say, it is an attic room. As Hsin Ying Chi points out, Victorian architects never paid much attention to this architectural space; although the attic was a common part of a house, it was usually used only for storage. As such, it used to be unfinished and undecorated since no one was really interested in what is in there and the attic was never displayed to visitors; it was virtually invisible. Hence, Chi observes, "the attic becomes an unimportant, hidden, and often forgotten part of the house. The attic is a part of the house, but it is a part of the house that is secluded."[58] Consequently, Chi argues, the appearance of the image of the attic in women´s writing is no coincidence:

> Victorian architectural structure offers an iconic picture of the ideological structure in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, [in which] man possesses political,

[58] Hsin Ying Chi, "Introduction: Women's Attics, Women's Spaces," *Artist and Attic: A Study of Poetic Space in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999) 3.

> economic, and social power whereas a woman's position is very limited: her roles of wife and mother almost exclude [her] from activities in the outside world. […] She is part of the society, but she is subordinate to man in the same way as an attic is subordinate to the other rooms of a Victorian house.[59]

Same as the attic, Chi adds, a woman was virtually invisible in the era. What is more, the space of the attic was often very limited; as such, it comes to stand for women´s imprisonment within patriarchal structures.[60] Hence, the attic room the main heroine is forced to occupy can be read as a symbol of her subordination, seclusion, confinement and marginalization.

The symbolism of the attic room may also be interpreted from a different angle: Gilman´s predecessor Charlotte Brontë situated the insane Bertha Mason, the first wife of Edward Rochester, into an attic room in her 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, about which Gilbert and Gubar have written that it "explores the tension between parlor and attic, the psychic split between the lady who submits to male dicta and the lunatic who rebels."[61] In this way, the rebellious attempt of Gilman´s heroine to defy patriarchal authority seems to be connected to the madness of Brontë´s heroine and thus foredoomed to end in insanity from the beginning.

2.5 The Furnishings of the Room

The attic room in which the narrator stays has bars in the windows; there are "rings and things in the walls" (648), and the access to the room is secured by a "gate at the head of the stairs" (649). Clearly, these items are here to evoke the image of a prison, and thus, once again, stress the narrator´s confinement within the framework of male-dominated society. Alternately, one can think about these items as evoking the image of an insane asylum. The appearance of this image at the beginning of the story can be read as another foreshadowing of the narrator´s

[59] Chi, 4.
[60] Chi, 3-6.
[61] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 86.

decline into madness. In spite of this, the narrator assumes that the room was formerly used as a nursery and that the windows are barred because of the little children who lived there.

According to MacPike, the fact that the room used to be a nursery indicates Gilman´s heroine´s position in society: "The woman is legally a child; socially, economically, and philosophically she must be led by an adult - her husband; […]."[62] As MacPike asserts, the bars in the windows suggest that "the narrator is to be forever imprisoned in childhood, forbidden to 'escape' into adulthood," forbidden to become "a responsible member of society rather than merely a cloistered woman."[63] The "infantilization" the narrator is exposed to is considered by Eizabeth Ammons to be a part of a process of feminization imposed upon her.

Under the term "feminization" Ammons understands a "standard white middle-class process by which a grown woman, under the supervision of a 'male expert, was required to turn herself into a helpless, docile, overgrown infant – that is, a feminine adult."[64] Since Gilman experienced the rest cure, Ammons explains, she was convinced that it was simply an amplified version of the "normal" process of feminization that operated in the society anyway: "The intent of the cure, like the Victorian ideal of femininity it sought to instill, was to render a woman simultaneously and paradoxically all-body and yet supposedly asexual, a process that entailed strict prohibition of intellectual activity, fixation on physical re-productivity, and enforcement of childlike submission to masculine authority."[65] The result of such a treatment was a woman that was "fattened, purified, and ceremoniously carried about like a sacred object, […] blow[n] up to resemble a woman steadily and unchangingly six-months pregnant, or a pudgy baby that cannot yet walk."[66] Of course, there was no difference between these two symbols since both of them fell "outside the conventional Victorian

[62] MacPike, 286.
[63] MacPike, 286.
[64] Ammons, 36.
[65] Ammons, 36.
[66] Ammons, 36.

definition of what is sexual, a pregnant woman officially considered extra-sexual, a baby supposedly pre-sexual. Endlessly with child and at the same time *a* child, the successfully re-feminized woman is at first forced and later learns cheerfully to place her whole being in the hands of […] male authority."[67] However, Ammons points out, this supposedly asexual process of feminization takes place in a room in which the only piece of furniture is a bed.

It is important to remember that the narrator spends considerable amount of time in bed; of course, the bed can be seen as a site of sleep, rest and healing, but it is also a place of sexual intercourse and procreation. As such, the bed can be considered to be, as David Spurr puts it, a "source of the continuity of patriarchal order."[68] What is more, the expressions used to describe the bedstead that dominates the room are distinctly masculine and violent: the bed is depicted as being "great" and "heavy;" it "looks as if it had been through the wars," and it is said to be "fairly gnawed" (650, 655). Therefore, Ammons suggests, the bed can be read as a symbol of "male sexual privilege and dominance, including violence,"[69] to which the women were exposed in the process of becoming "feminine." Accordingly, the narrator is "simultaneously denied her adult female body by the room (a 'nursery')," Ammons explains, "*and* defined as nothing *but* the body by the bed."[70]

At the same time, the immovable bedstead, fixed to the floor, may be seen a metaphor of the main heroine´s situation: she is stuck in the middle of patriarchy and cannot see a way out. "This bed will *not* move!" the narrator tells us, "I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner – but it hurt my teeth" (655). No matter how hard she tries, the bed and everything that the bed symbolizes will not change.

[67] Ammons, 36.
[68] David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (University of Michigan Press: 2012) 7.
[69] Ammons, 38.
[70] Ammons, 37-8.

2.6 The Yellow Wallpaper: Its Pattern

First of all, the wallpaper might be interpreted as a symbol of the oppressive structures of patriarchal society. For Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, the wallpaper represents the textual and architectural confinement of women: "Ancient, smoldering, 'unclean' as the oppressive structures of the society in which she finds herself, this paper surrounds the narrator like an inexplicable text, censorious and overwhelming as her physician husband, haunting as the 'hereditary estate' in which she is trying to survive."[71] Similarly, Carol Thomas Neely claims that "as part of the ancestral home, the wallpaper is emblematic of the aging and restrictive institutions of patriarchy. […] Tenacious and oppressive, it is hard to get off the walls. It has bars which trap the narrator´s imprisoned doubles […]."[72] Clearly, the wallpaper can be seen as the most potent embodiment of the forces that restrict and control Gilman´s heroine.

Scrutinizing the damaging effect of the wallpaper on the narrator, John S. Bak compares the wallpaper to Jeremy Bentham´s eighteenth-century Panopticon, as described in Michel Foucault´s *Discipline and Punish*. "Wheel-like in structure with a central tower at its hub and connecting cells […] protruding from its middle," Bak writes, "'the panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately.'"[73] As a result, only one person was needed to oversee all prisoners. "The Panopticon´s directive," Bak explains, "would be to 'induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.' The goals to achieve this power were twofold: to make the subject visible and the observer´s presence unverifiable."[74] Since the prisoners could not see the warden, they did not know when they

[71] Gilbert and Gubar, 90.
[72] Carol Thomas Neely, "Alternative Women´s Discourse," *Tulsa Studies in Women´s Literature* Vol.4, No. 2, Fall 1985: 316.
[73] Bak, 41 [*Foucault, Michel*: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1975, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) 195-228.].
[74] Bak, 41.

were, or were not, being watched. Such an "unscrupulous method of inquisition," Bak observes, "perpetuated fear and bred paranoia,"[75] especially as it began to extend beyond the institution of the prison, becoming a social practice.

In the narrator´s description of the wallpaper, one can discern a striking similarity with the features of the Panopticon: "There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down. [...] Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere" (649). She soon trusts to her journal that "this paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!" (649). Inevitably, as a result of the unabated surveillance of the "two bulbous eyes," Bak points out, "the narrator passes through stages from concern to paranoia and, finally, to madness."[76]

Furthermore, the wallpaper may be read as another symbol of the futility of the narrator´s situation. Although she devotes so much energy to describing the wallpaper, it remains, Elaine R. Hedges tells us, "mysteriously, hauntingly undefined and only vaguely visible."[77] In this respect, Hedges argues, the wallpaper mirrors the situation of Gilman´s heroine, "as seen by the men who control her and hence her situation as seen by herself. How can she define herself?"[78] In her struggle to discover her identity, the narrator attempts to follow the "bloated curves and flourishes – a kind of 'debased Romanesque' with delirium tremens – go waddling up and down" (652); yet, just as she is about to find some logic and meaning in the patterns, she notes that the wallpaper "slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you" (653). "Her insights, and her desperate attempts to define and thus cure herself by tracing the bewildering pattern of the wallpaper and deciphering its meaning,"

[75] Bak, 40.
[76] Bak, 42.
[77] Elaine R. Hedges, "Afterword," *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1973) 57.
[78] Hedges, 57.

Hedges observes, "are poor weapons against the male certainty of her husband, whose attitude toward her is that 'bless her little heart' he will *allow* her to be 'as sick as she pleases.'"[79]

At the end of the story, the narrator identifies with the "woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (652), and starts creeping as well: "I always lock the door when I creep by daylight" (654). Apparently, Hedges observes, women in patriarchal society are sentenced to creeping and the narrator knows it: "She has fought as best she could against creeping. In her perceptivity and in her resistance lies her heroism (her heroineism). But […] on her last day in the house, as she peels off yards and yards of wallpaper and creeps around the floor, she has been defeated. She is totally mad."[80] Nonetheless, according to Hedges:

> in her mad-sane way [the narrator] has seen the situation of women for what it is. She has wanted to strangle the woman behind the paper - tie her with a rope. For that woman, the tragic product of her society, is of course the narrator's self. By rejecting that woman she might free the other, imprisoned woman within herself. But the only available rejection is suicidal, and hence she descends into madness. Madness is her only freedom, […].

Thus, for Hedges and other interpreters of the story (Bak, Gilbert and Gubar or Jean E. Kennard), the narrator´s descent into madness is actually "a flight from dis-ease into health."[81]

Finally, the wallpaper may be read as a representation of masculine discourse. The wallpaper's pattern "is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, *pronounced* enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide […], destroy themselves in *unheard of contradictions*" (648). According to Janice Hanney-Peritz, who chose the previous excerpt, the italicized words suggest that the wallpaper does not only stand for the oppressive structures of patriarchal society in general, but that "the specific oppressive structure at issue

[79] Hedges, 60.
[80] Hedges, 61.
[81] Gilbert and Gubar, 91.

is discourse."[82] Indeed, thinking about the "unheard of contradictions" of John´s attitude towards his wife (he assures her that there is nothing the matter with her and at the same time prescribes the rest cure), Hanney-Peritz argues that "the oppressive structure at issue is a man's prescriptive discourse about a woman."[83]

To be more precise, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," this prescriptive masculine discourse takes a form of medical diagnosis. "Medical diagnosis," Paula A. Treichler explains, "stands as a prime example of an authorized linguistic process (distilled, respected, high-paying) whose representational claims are strongly supported by social, cultural and economic practices. Even more than most forms of male discourse, the diagnostic process is multiply-sanctioned."[84] In the case of Gilman´s story, Treichler argues, "the diagnostic language of the physician is coupled with the paternalistic language of the husband to create a formidable array of controls over [the narrator´s] behavior. Once pronounced, and reinforced by the second opinion of her brother this diagnosis not only names reality but also has considerable power over what that reality is now to be."[85] In other words, the wallpaper can be said to stand for patriarchal discourse, imposed upon the narrator in the form of medical diagnosis.

2.7 The Yellow Wallpaper: Its Color

To sum up, in the story´s symbolism, the wallpaper can be said to stand for the restrictive structures of patriarchal society, the desperate situation of the narrator, and masculine discourse/medical diagnosis. That is why the narrator is struggling so passionately to tear the wallpaper off. However, here it is necessary to point out the importance of distinguishing

[82] Janice Haney-Peritz, "Monumental Feminism and Literature's Ancestral House: Another Look at 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work*, ed. Sheryl L. Meyering (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989) 96.
[83] Hanney-Peritz, 96.
[84] Treichler, "Escaping the Sentence, 69.
[85] Treichler, "Escaping the Sentence," 65-6.

between the pattern of the wallpaper and its color. From the moment the narrator discerns the woman trapped behind the wallpaper, she begins to use the term "pattern" more frequently than the term "wallpaper:" "The front pattern *does* move – and no wonder. The woman behind shakes it! […] And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern – it strangles so […]" (654). Later, "it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean" (653), says the narrator, and it is the pattern that "keeps [the woman] so still" (653). It is the pattern of the wallpaper, resembling bars, behind which the woman is caught, it is the ornament on the wallpaper that is the symbol of women´s imprisonment within the structures of male-governed society, and it is its design that makes the narrator want to tear the wallpaper down. On the other hand, the yellow color of the wallpaper can be read as a symbol of gender neutrality.

Colleen Taylor draws our attention to the yellowness of the wallpaper used to adorn the attic room into which the main heroine has been confined, and which, as the narrator believes, used to be a nursery. The wallpaper, Taylor tells us, was very likely pasted to the walls when the room still served as a nursery by "expecting parents [who], unsure of the sex of their child, often choose yellow as the color for a nursery. Unlike pink or blue, it is gender neutral, specifying neither sex."[86] As a result, the yellow color of the wallpaper might be said to "embody the idea of gender neutrality and allude to a point in life when gender specification is less important."[87] As such, the yellow shade of the wallpaper is at first repugnant to the narrator: "The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smoldering unclean yellow, […]. It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others" (649).

[86] Colleen Taylor, "Yellow: 'The Monster-Woman´s' Favorite Color," *Bricolage Literary Journal*, 2011: 3.
[87] Taylor, 3.

This repulsion, Taylor claims, might be explained as a manifestation of the narrator´s internalization of and adhesion to male assumptions about the role and position of women in a family and in society in general, imposed on her by her husband:

> She has accepted her subjugated role as a woman and as a second class citizen and has fully assumed the role of the "angel" that Gilbert and Gubar describe. […] She has completely resigned herself to this helpless, docile, submissive role, and, even worse, she identifies herself by it. [She] has been constructed by John, and she knows herself only through her compliant interaction with and her constant submission to him.[88]

Yet, as the story progresses, the narrator begins to grow fond of the paper, and the more she identifies with its yellowness, the more she feels encouraged to resist John. Towards the end of the story, she becomes truly obsessed with the yellow color of the wallpaper, thus "evolving into the world of gender neutrality, […] a world that does not subjugate women, that knows no gender and therefore treats everyone equally."[89] Tellingly, in the end of the story, she exclaims that she does not want to go outside, "for outside you have to creep on the ground and everything is green instead of yellow" (656). Apparently, she does not want to leave the safe world of gender neutrality, and she also does not want to leave the room that she has finally, after tearing down the wallpaper, transformed according to her wishes.

"I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path" (656), the narrator says to us and we realize that she has had the key from the room all along, and that it was the wallpaper, or rather its oppressive pattern, not the room, that she wanted to escape from. Besides, this time, it is the narrator who locks herself in the room, thus locking out the man and gaining privacy, gaining a space that is her own. The reversal of roles that takes place afterwards, "It is no use, young man, you can´t open it!" (656) demonstrates how empowering having a room of one´s own is. Similarly, her final gesture of walking over

[88] Taylor, 6.
[89] Taylor, 12.

John´s unconscious body can be seen as an act of triumph: she has finally gained identity independent from that of his.

Nonetheless, the outcome of the story is not as optimistic as it would seem. The narrator of the story has finally gained power over her room, but at what cost? She is insane, and although some of the critics celebrate her madness as a triumph, as a higher form of sanity, her victory is only temporary: there is no viable solution for her unless the material conditions of the society she lives in change. In this sense, Gilman´s story can be read not only as a criticism of Mitchell´s rest cure, but also as a comment on broader social, cultural, political and economical situation of women in late nineteenth-century America.

To conclude, in this chapter, attention has been paid to the ways spatial setting (i.e. the house, garden, attic room resembling prison, insane asylum, alternately nursery, and its furnishing) was utilized to mirror the narrator´s submission to patriarchal oppression, her isolation, confinement and marginalization. The way Gilman´s heroine´s living space influenced her psyche has also been dealt with. The most powerful and effective symbol of the main heroine´s, as well as other Victorian women´s conditions, is the yellow wallpaper. It has been interpreted as representing the oppressive patriarchal society, the hopeless situation of the narrator, and restrictive masculine discourse. Symbolically, it was only after the narrator ripped off the wallpaper that she gained control over her room, thus gathering strength to assume her own independent identity. Indeed, in *Women and Economics* Gilman writes: "The progressive individuation of human beings requires a personal home, one room at least for each person."[90] Sadly, the extent and permanency of Gilman´s narrator´s triumph remain disputable.

[90] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Cosimo, Inc., 2007) 128.

3. Sandra Cisneros´s *The House on Mango Street*

"In Chicano literature," Monika Kaup observes, "houses attained unprecedented prominence in the decade of the 1980s, in what is known as the period of post-nationalism."[91] In the works written in this period, Kaup adds, the house was employed "as the master metaphor for the construction of identity."[92] This trend is also evident in Sandra Cisneros´s 1984 novella *The House on Mango Street*: the image of the house appears already in the title, and it is central to the depiction of the heroine´s development both as a Chicana and Chicana writer. Therefore, this chapter is going to examine the way the narrator´s quest for an independent identity and self-expression is connected to the symbol of the house and spatial imagery.

As mentioned above, houses play an important role in conveying both the external and internal conditions of Esperanza´s life in an impoverished part of Chicago inhabited by Chicano/as and Puerto Ricans. There are different types of houses in the novella; firstly, the image of the house is utilized to give the reader an idea of the poverty and limited opportunities of those who live in Esperanza´s neighborhood. Further, houses can be read as symbols of Latina women´s confinement within the structures of patriarchal dominance. At the same time, the house serves as an embodiment of Esperanza´s dreams, hopes and plans.

3.1 House as a Symbol of Poverty

Esperanza is well aware that Mango Street is one of those shabby streets on which well-to-do people do not want to live. She is reminded of this by Cathy who tells her that she will be her friend only until next Tuesday because then they will move away: "Got to. Then as if she

[91] Monika Kaup, "The Architecture of Ethnicity in Chicano Literature," *American Literature* Vol. 69, No. 2, Jun. 1997: 363.
[92] Kaup, 363.

forgot I just moved in, she says the neighborhood is getting bad."[93] The decline and poverty of Esperanza´s quarter are demonstrated on her neighbors´ houses. Meme Ortiz, for instance, lives in a house that is wooden: "Inside the floors slant. Some rooms uphill. Some down. And there are no closets. Out front there are twenty-one steps, all lopsided and jutting like crooked teeth […]" (21-22). Behind the shaky, distorted and confined house that does not provide its inhabitants with any privacy is a yard, "mostly dirt" with "a greasy bunch of boards that used to be a garage" (22). The garage has disintegrated into pieces, same as the neighborhood; moreover, the "bunch of boards" reminds us of the fact that the car, a traditional American symbol of success, freedom and mobility, is missing. Finally, we are told that "downstairs from Meme´s is a basement apartment that Meme´s mother fixed up and rented to a Puerto Rican family" (23). In this way, the crampedness of the house and the want of privacy are further stressed; besides, the fact that Meme´s mother needs boarders points to the family´s lack of self-reliance, another of the virtues conventionally venerated by American dominant society.

In "Geraldo No Last Name," Cisneros associates the "kitchenettes," "two-room flats and sleeping rooms" (66) the young Mexican has to inhabit, while working in the United States to support his family, with racism perpetuated by mainstream white culture aimed towards Chicano/as. This racism is made evident when Geraldo is denied proper medical care after being wounded at a dance. Hence, the space the people surrounding Esperanza inhabit can be seen as an indicator of their poverty and restricted opportunities stemming from their marginal status in a white dominated society.

[93] Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 13. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

3.2 House as a Symbol of Women´s Confinement

However, Karen W. Martin argues, women in this community are victims of double oppression: they are restricted not only by the racism of the white culture but also by the patriarchal dominance of their fathers and husbands: "Domestic space, rearticulated by Cisneros to reflect the dynamic nature of urban community buildings, reinforces race, class, and gender hierarchy imposed externally by the dominant Anglo culture, as well as those internally imposed upon the inscribed space of Mango Street by Latino patriarchy."[94] As a result, Andrea O'Reilly Herrera claims, "the Chicana is a minority within a minority," forced to "struggle against (external) racism and (internal) sexism."[95] The internal sexism, to which a Chicana is subjugated, is impressed upon the reader in a series of vignettes dedicated to the women in Esperanza´s neighborhood who are imprisoned in men´s houses.

According to Martin, these vignettes "highlight female immobility, isolation, and victimization as a result of cloistered domestic life by presenting […] women who are displaced, or out-of-place, within their own homes."[96] In other words, narrating the stories of the women in her community, Jacqueline Doyle points out, "Esperanza recognizes that a room - if not of one's own - can be stifling."[97] Thus, we are introduced to Mamacita who went "up, up, up, the stairs" (77) and then nobody saw her again on the street. She just "sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio shows and sings all the homesick songs about her country" (77), and says "No speak English" to her baby boy "who is singing in a language that sounds like tin" (78). "As she loses her linguistic identity," Martin argues, "she loses the 'social topography' that had previously defined her 'intimate topography' by 'reconciling

[94] Karen W. Martin, "The House (of Memory) on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros´s Counter-Poetics of Space," *South Atlantic Review* Vol. 73, No.1, Winter 2008: 50.
[95] Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, "'Chambers of Consciousness:' Sandra Cisneros and the Development of the Self in the BIG *House on Mango Street*," *Bucknell Review* 39.1, 1995: 202.
[96] Martin, 62.
[97] Jacqueline Doyle, "More Room of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros´s *The House on Mango Street*," *MELUS* Vol. 19, No. 4, Ethnic Women Writers VI, Winter 1994:10.

subject and country, ethnicity and place,' leaving her de-territorialized, feeling homeless despite her constant positioning at 'home.'"[98] Mamacita, who is (like Gilman´s narrator who was trapped in the attic room) situated at the top of the house, "up, up, up" (77), far away from the streets and other people, unwilling or unable to come down, clearly feels alienated and isolated in her new home that is not a home for her at all.

Further, Esperanza tells us about Rafaela whose husband "is afraid [she] will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (79), so he locks her at home at nights he plays dominoes. Apparently, Rafaela´s existence is passive, as she is absolutely dependent on the will of her husband, who is a sole ruler of the household. On Tuesday nights, Rafaela

> drinks and drinks coconut and papaya juice […] and wishes there were sweeter drinks, not bitter like an empty room, but sweet sweet like the island, like the dance hall down the street where women much older than her throw green eyes easily like dice and open homes with keys. And always there is someone offering sweeter drinks, someone offering to keep them on a silver string (80).

Tellingly, in order to reach the juice, Rafaela lets down a clothesline; an eloquent symbol of both domestic chores and the confinement of women caught on "a silver string."

Similarly, Minerva is unable to gain control over her living space: "One day she is through and lets [her husband] know enough is enough. […] But that night he comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry and she opens the door again" (85). "Despite her attempts to usurp control over her own domestic space," Martin observes, "she never gains the agency and mobility necessary for a true reconfiguring of this zone, because the constant menace of her abuser´s return ensures his continued dominance of the home."[99] Once again, Minerva´s inability to appropriate the space she lives in as truly her own reflects her inability to gain freedom and independence from male dominance.

[98] Martin, 63.
[99] Martin, 64.

Alicia, who "is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university" (31), is an exception among these women since she refuses to resign herself to her fate and pursues education in order to escape the barrio. However, for the time being, she is forced to conform to her father´s ideas about the role of women: "a woman´s place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears just in time to rise and catch the hide legs behind the sink, […]." (31). In this case, Julian Olivares argues, the "tortilla star" does not represent "a symbol of cultural identity but a symbol of a subjugating ideology, of sexual domination, of the imposition of a role that the young woman must assume."[100] Another example of Cisneros´s clever transformation of the meaning of conventionally used symbolism appears in Esperanza´s recounting of the story of her too beautiful friend Sally.

To escape her father´s beatings and prohibitions, Sally gets married. Unfortunately, her husband is as domineering as her father: she can neither use the phone nor look out the window, and she is not allowed to invite her friends, so she just "sits at home and looks at all the things they own: […]. She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake" (102). Once again, Olivares claims, the image of the "linoleum roses" might be read as "a trope for household confinement and drudgery, in which the semes of rose - beauty, femininity, garden (the outside) - and rose as a metaphor for woman are ironically treated. The roses decorate the linoleum floor that Sally will have to scrub. This is an image of her future."[101] Olivares further argues that these images can be regarded as being "derived from a woman's perception of reality; that is to say, that this imagery is not biologically determined but that it is culturally inscribed. A woman's place may be in the home but it is a patriarchic domain."[102]

[100] Julian Olivares, "Sandra Cisneros´ *The House on Mango Street,* and the Poetics of Space," *Americas Review* 15.3-4, Fall-Winter 1987: 163.
[101] Olivares, 164.
[102] Olivares, 164.

Interestingly, the image of the roses is utilized here in the same way as the image of the garden in "The Yellow Wallpaper:" they demarcate the limits of the women´s shriveled worlds.

Thinking about the women of Mango Street, Annie O. Eysturoy claims that what all these women have in common,

> is not only their entrapment in oppressive socio-cultural circumstances, but their internalization of a definition of self that is determined by phallocentric cultural values. They are thus not only confined within their own houses, but also confined by their own minds, by the conditioned limitations of their own self-perception. Their lives and actions, dominated by fathers and husbands, are physically and psychologically entrapped within oppressive patriarchal structures, and they can envision themselves only in the seemingly inescapable roles of future wives and mothers.[103]

In "The Monkey Garden," Esperanza describes such adhesion to prescribed feminine behavior on the part of Sally: "One of the boys invented the rules. One of Tito's friends said you can't get the keys back unless you kiss us and Sally pretended to be mad at first but she said yes." (96). "Pretending to be playing," Eysturoy explains, "the boys imitate patriarchal power by setting the rules of the game, and Sally, imitating what she thinks are female means of gaining male approval, passively acquiesces to sexual control."[104] Whereas Esperanza feels that "something wasn't right" (97), Sally, "having internalized male definitions of her sexuality, sees her own actions as a sign of being a grown-up woman."[105] Thus, it is not surprising that when Sally (and other women of Mango Street – think, for example, of Marin who is passively waiting for someone "who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away" (26)) yearns for a space of her own, the only means of acquiring a house she can think of is through marriage. In this way, Sugiyama writes, "the women of Mango Street are forced

[103] Annie O Eysturoy, "*The House on Mango Street*: A Space of Her Own," *Sandra Cisneros´s The House on Mango Street*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010) 71.
[104] Eysturoy, 69.
[105] Eysturoy, 69.

into a kind of prostitution, using their sexuality to get husbands, houses, pillowcases, and plates."[106] Therefore, in these situations, the image of the house can be said to stand not only for the actual entrapment of women within male architectural structures, but also for the metaphorical entrapment of women´s minds within the framework of patriarchal ideology.

3.3 "The Girl Who Didn´t Want to Belong"

Observing the fates of the women around her, Eysturoy argues, Esperanza "becomes aware of the true nature of patriarchal ideology and her own position as a woman within her particular socio-cultural context,"[107] and decides to reject this position and develop her own autonomous identity. In "My name," Esperanza tells us about her great-grandmother, "a wild horse of a woman" (11), whose name she has inherited. She was so wild, Esperanza explains, that "she wouldn´t marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier" (11), a mere domestic decoration with no will of her own. (Here, once again, household furnishing is used as a symbol of women´s subjugation to male dominance.) Afterwards, "she looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (11). However, Esperanza is determined not to follow in her footsteps: "I have inherited her name, but I don´t want to inherit her place by the window" (11). Her defiance is expressed in her wish to change her name, which means "sadness" and waiting" in Spanish: "I would like to babtize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (11). In other words, as Olivares argues, "Esperanza prefers a name not culturally embedded in a dominating, male-centered ideology."[108]

[106] Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, "Of woman bondage: The eroticism of feet in The House on Mango Street," *The Midwest Quarterly* 41, 1, Autumn 1999:17.
[107] Eysturoy, 70.
[108] Olivares, 163.

Esperanza´s quest for freedom continues with her refusal of high-heel shoes; that is to say, as Ellen McCracken puts it, with her refusal of "male sexual power that is frequently disguised as desirable male attention and positive validation of women, though what is, in fact, sexual reification."[109] In "A Smart Cookie," Esperanza´s determination to decide about her life is expressed in her appropriation of urban space.

In this vignette, Esperanza´s mother´s wasted talents and unfulfilled dreams are juxtaposed to her inability to navigate in the space of the city: "She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V. But she doesn´t know which subway train to take to get downtown" (90). Apparently, Esperanza´s mother´s lack of ability to transgress the borders of the barrio mirrors her inability to, in the words of Juanita Heredia, "transcend social restrictions placed upon [her] by cultural values, educational authorities, and patriarchal domination."[110] Esperanza, on the other hand, experiences the alluring feeling of freedom and independence as she is riding her newly-purchased bicycle in a chapter that is symbolically called "Our Good Day." "By taking this step," Heredia says, "Esperanza becomes an active agent of her life," and "cross[es] social restrictions placed upon her. […] She dives into this transportation culture to avoid the pitfalls of a 'sitting by the window' destiny."[111]

From this moment on, Esperanza will be able to go wherever and whenever she wishes. What is more, Heredia observes, this moment "signifies a new perspective of space and the ability to develop one's potential when everyone tells Esperanza that she should not bother to leave her home. A motivated figure, she proves that she too can set up her own definition and appropriation of space in the city."[112] In this way, the urban space imagery, besides that of the

[109] Ellen McCracken, "Sandra Cisneros´ *The House on Mango Street:* Community-Oriented Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence," *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings,* Eds. A. Horno-Delgado, and E. Orgeta (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989) 67.
[110] Juanita Heredia, "Down These City Streets: Exploring Urban Space in *El Bronx Remembered* and *The House on Mango Street*," *Mester* 22-23.1-2, Fall-Spring 1993: 96.
[111] Heredia, 100.
[112] Heredia, 101.

domestic space, is used to reflect upon Esperanza´s development. However, Esperanza´s decision "not to belong" is most significantly symbolized by her rejection of her "daddy´s" house (108).

3.4 The House on Mango Street

As O´Reilly Herrera argues, "for Cisneros the house on Mango Street simultaneously represents all of the systems that oppose or challenge her as a woman, a minority, and a writer."[113] In other words, the house, owned and dominated by a man, stands for women´s confinement within the structures of both main-stream and Latino patriarchal society. What is more, Eysturoy states, "to Esperanza the house on Mango Street is an emblem of the oppressive socioeconomic situation that circumscribes her life and is the source of her feelings of alienation."[114] This is evident from a scene in which a nun from Esperanza´s school asks her where she lives: "You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing" (5). Indeed, the house Esperanza lives in is far from the white, middle-class ideal home described in Bachelard´s *The Poetics of Space*.

For Bachelard, the house of one´s childhood is both a protected and protective space, providing privacy and shelter and encouraging day-dreaming. This "protected intimacy"[115] is ensured by the house´s verticality – such a house must have at least three stories and is defined in terms of the "polarity of cellar and attic."[116] Non-vertical urban apartments are therefore presented as "purely rootles" "superimposed boxes,"[117] utterly inadequate for the provision of "proofs or illusion of stability."[118] Consequently, Martin writes, Bachelard´s

[113] O´Reilly Herrera, 193.
[114] Eysturoy, 63.
[115] *Gaston Bachelard*: *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 3.
[116] Bachelard, 17.
[117] Bachelard, 26-7.
[118] Bachelard, 17.

idealized remembered home is characterized "by the possibility of migration and movement, so that agency derives from the psychological stability provided by private domestic nooks and corners that promote contemplation and rest."[119] In addition, Martin says, "creativity, both in childhood and for the adult artist, is propelled by the notion of belonging to and being protected by a stead, vertically rising childhood home whose chief benefit is that 'the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.'"[120] Such domestic space is coined by Bachelard as *felicitous space*.

Unfortunately, the house on Mango Street is diametrically different not only from the house Esperanza dreams about but also from Bachelard´s idealized house of memory. First of all, her vision of "a real house" is informed by the notion of verticality: "And inside it would have real stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on TV. And we´d have a basement […]" (4). Yet, the house she lives in opposes such notions by its "tight steps in front" and "ordinary hallway stairs" (4). Furthermore, the house on Mango Street, with windows "so small you´d think they were holding their breath" and the front door "so swollen you have to push hard to get in" (4), seems to resist free movement and migration of its inhabitants. In addition, the fact that the house is curbed from all four sides ("There is no front yard, only four little elms […] Out back is a small garage for the car we don´t own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side" (4)), makes it even more suffocating.

Esperanza dreams about a big white house, but the house she inhabits is small and red; "the house´s colorful red façade," Kaup points out, "like the brown skin of its inhabitants, marks it as a nonwhite residence."[121] Moreover, Esperanza yearns for privacy: she tells us that her dream house will have "at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we wouldn´t have to tell everybody" (4). In reality, they have only one washroom and she has to share a

[119] Martin, 50.
[120] Martin, 51-2 [Bachelard, 6].
[121] Kaup, 386-7.

bedroom with her younger sister Nenny. Accordingly, Martin observes, the house is marked "by its complete absence of private, secure spaces; unlike the inviting nooks which encourage reading, writing, and contemplation in the idealized house, this home does not even include a closet which might have served as a quiet refuge for the development of a child´s imagination."[122] Apparently, Esperanza, same as other women on Mango Street, does not have a space that she could call her own. Subsequently, Martin claims, "The house on Mango Street may be read as the oneiric or remembered home reframed as a destabilized, unprotected public space delimited by horizontality, and consequently, by stagnation or paralysis."[123] As such, the house can be interpreted as a symbol of the life in the stifling and restricting barrio, circumscribed and oppressed by the Anglo culture. Hence, Esperanza´s rejection of her father´s house may be read as a rejection of the poverty, violence and lack of opportunity on Mango Street.

3.5 A House of Her Own

At the same time, Olivares argues, the house Esperanza lives in might be read as a mirror image of herself: "The house on Mango Street is essentially the narrator's first universe. She starts here because it is the beginning of her conscious narrative reflection. […] The house is much more than a place to live; it is an extension of her identity. By pointing to this dilapidated house, she points to herself, revealing her own poverty and shame."[124] As a result, Olivares states, her wish to have a house she "could point to" (5) can be seen as a wish to

[122] Martin, 58.
[123] Martin, 50.
[124] Julian Olivares, "Entering *The House on Mango Street* (Sandra Cisneros)," *Teaching American Ethnic Literatures: Nineteen Essays*, Ed. John R. Maitino and David R. Peck (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996) 225.

point to another, better self: “The desire to live in a beautiful house is concomitant to finding another identity.”[125]

However, Olivares continues, “as her character develops in the work and she becomes more aware of her gender constraints, the wish for a pretty house becomes a desire for unfettered female space;” Esperanza realizes that “the identity she seeks must be freed from the gender oppression of her culture.”[126] Hence, as Doyle puts it, the house Esperanza longs for can be seen as a place of liberation from the “tyrannies of male houses and male plots.”[127] Therefore, the house she dreams about will be, quite literally, a shelter from men´s dominance, prohibitions, restrictions, commands, insults and beatings; a house Sally, among others, needs so desperately: “And you could laugh, Sally. You could go to sleep and wake up and never have to think who likes and doesn´t like you. […] And no one could yell at you if they saw you out in the dark leaning against a car” (82-3). The house Esperanza imagines for herself fulfills this function as well: “Not a man´s house. Not a daddy´s. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. […] Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody´s garbage to pick up after” (108). This will be a house in which Esperanza will be neither someone´s wife nor someone´s daughter; nobody will tell her what she should or should not do, and she will be her own mistress.

Nonetheless, as Esperanza´s concern about Sally and her democratic intention to open her house to “passing bums” because she knows “how it is to be without a house” (87) expressed in “Bums in the Attic,” suggest, Esperanza imagines her house also as a space open to virtually anybody in her neighborhood who needs shelter and comfort. Consequently, as Martin argues, Esperanza´s dream house can be seen as “a third space,” created between the poverty-stricken and confining house(s) on Mango Street and Bachelard´s privileged,

[125] Olivares, “Entering…,” 225.
[126] Olivares, “Entering…,” 225-6.
[127] Doyle, 19.

mainstream, middle-class non-urban houses of memory: it can be seen as "a new type of idealized home, a heterotopic space that combines the sense of possibility, creativity, and corporeal mobility offered by the stereotypical home of the American dream with a refusal to render invisible those who fall outside the parameters of wealth and social status."[128] Such a space, Martin continues, "will serve as one of memory not because it adheres to Bachelard´s idealized notion, but because it allows the narrator to remember her own roots and provide shelter to those who lack a secure domestic space. […] Esperanza will design a counter-narrative of the home as nurturing source of creative energy, and simultaneously, a shelter for the disenfranchised and displaced who share her roots."[129] "Free to tell stories," Doyle observes, "Esperanza […] will speak for herself and her people, in her own voice, from a vividly imagined house of her own."[130] In this way, Esperanza will be able to fulfill the promise given to the three sisters to "come back for the others. […] For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (105, 110).

Consequently, Eysturoy argues, Esperanza´s dream is "transformed into a more defined desire for a place that transcends the mere physical living quarters to mean a life of her own creation. She wants not only a house but also a life that is unconfined by either a father or a husband or prescriptive social expectations, a non-patriarchal space in which she can create herself and a self-defined destiny:"[131] "My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. […] Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (108). According to Eysturoy, "discovering, synthesizing, and narrating her own experiences within the community on Mango Street," Esperanza has realized that the house she seeks is "an un-confining creative space. Telling her own story, [she] participates in

[128] Martin, 65.
[129] Martin, 66.
[130] Doyle, 26.
[131] Eysturoy, 74.

the process of her own self-formation, while she at the same time creates a poetic space that stands as an alternative to the confining conditions of Mango Street."[132] The confirmation of the notion that independent identity and freedom can be achieved through the space of writing appears in "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes:"

> […] what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to. I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. (109-110)

Therefore, Eysturoy argues, "Esperanza's search for a 'real' house is at the same time a quest for self-expression, for a liberating self-creation that dismantles traditional male-defined myths and texts that have locked the Chicana into confining stereotypes."[133] Indeed, Eysturoy concludes, the above mentioned "connection between the house and the text—her house is a poem yet to be written—turns her rejection of a 'man's house' into a rejection of what Gilbert and Gubar have termed 'patriarchal poetics.'"[134] Accordingly, "her escape from the house of the fathers is an escape from male texts. Her own quest for a 'real' house is thus a quest for a new Chicana text, one that names her own experiences and represents her as a Chicana in all her subjective complexity, […]."[135]

3.6 House of Fiction

The refusal of "arcades or domes" of fiction, built of sentences that "has been [shaped] by men out of their own needs for their own uses,"[136] as Virginia Woolf puts it, is evident in the unusual style, structure and focus of *The House on Mango Street*. In *A Room of One's Own,*

[132] Eysturoy, 74-5.
[133] Eysturoy, 77.
[134] Eysturoy, 77.
[135] Eysturoy, 77.
[136] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One´s Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965) 80.

Woolf predicted that women writers would need to break the sentences of men in order to develop forms that would be more "adapted to the [woman's] body,"[137] and thus more relevant to her experience. As a result, Woolf explains, "women´s books should be shorter, more concentrated than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work."[138] In this respect, as Doyle points out, Cisneros´s series of short vignettes, written in a deceptively simple language, marked by genre ambiguity (at least in the framework of male-centred literary tradition), and portraying marginalized, mostly female characters can be said to fulfil Woolf´s prophecies.[139] Cisneros´s departure from a path trod by a long line of male authors and critics may also be discerned in her treatment of the traditional paradigm of Bildungsroman.

"Like her narrator who does not wish to inherit the ready-made house of her *barrio*," Stella Bolaki observes, "Cisneros renovates 'the rented cultural space' of the *Bildungsroman*."[140] As Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and Tey Diana Rebolledo assert, the opportunities of the heroines in female Bildungsromanen are, in contrast to their male counterparts, remarkably limited:

> In contrast to the young male hero who at the end of the *Bildungsroman* comes into a complete sense of integration and freedom, the female adolescent is carefully schooled to function in society, to lose her freedom and her sense of individuality in order to become a loving wife and mother. She thus integrates her destiny with that of a man who will protect her, defend her and create a life for her. Whereas in their rites-of-passage, adolescent males encounter tests of strength and valor […], younger girls [are] given

[137] Woolf, 78.
[138] Woolf, 78.
[139] Doyle, 11-12.
[140] Stella Bolaki, "'This Bridge We Call Home:' Crossing and Bridging Spaces in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," *ESharp: Electronic Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts Review for Postgraduates* 5 2005: 14 [L. S. Gutiérrez-Jones, L. S., "Different Voices: The *Re-Bildung* of the Barrio in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narratives by Women*, C. J. Singley and S. E. Sweeney (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 310].

> ‘tests in submission’ while their older sisters [are] provided with models of behavior appropriate for success in the marriage market.[141]

In *The House on Mango Street*, the genre of the Bildungsroman is subverted by Esperanza´s determination to defy the fate outlined for her by patriarchal ideology, symbolized by her desire for a house of her own. In this way, Esperanza´s (and Cisneros´s) liberation from the “tyrannies of male houses and male plots” is expressed both at the level of content and at the level of form.

To conclude, it has been demonstrated that in Sandra Cisneros´s novella *The House on Mango Street*, the titular image of the house plays an important role in reflecting upon the formation of the main heroine´s identity. Observing women confined in men´s houses in her neighborhood, passive and dependent upon men´s will, Esperanza comes to realize the harsh reality of the life in the barrio, and decides to transcend its limitations and restrictions. Her defiance is symbolized by her rejection of the patriarchal house, which to her represents not only male dominance and violence but also the poverty, ignorance and hopelessness of the life on Mango Street. Instead, she dreams about a house of her own; a house that in her imagination represents a kind of third space created between the houses on Mango Street and Bachelard´s suburban privileged houses; a non-patriarchal space in which she could be herself, and in which she could create; a communal space that would serve as a shelter for those who need it. The fact that Esperanza´s quest for freedom, independent identity and empowerment is expressed in spatial terms implies that the need for one´s own space is universal. In other words, this young Chicana´s coming-of-age story suggests that having a room (or a space, whether it be physical or mental) of one´s own is recognized as being important for the development of all women, regardless of their race, nationality or class.

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[141] Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and Tey Diana Rebolledo, “Growing Up Chicano: Tomás Rivera and Sandra Cisneros,” *International Studies in Honor of Tomás Rivera,* ed. Julián Olivares (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1986) 109-110.

4. Kate Chopin´s "The Storm"

Although Kate Chopin finished her short story "The Storm" in 1898, it was not published until 1969: "so certain was Chopin that this story would be unacceptable to readers in her own day," Allen Stein explains, "that she did not even try to get it published."[142] Presumably, the reason for this delayed publication was Chopin´s daring depiction of her heroine´s sexuality; not only is the actual lovemaking between Calixta and Alcée described in a quite courageous way, but it is also implied that Calixta´s involvement in adultery may be viewed as beneficial, as an assertion of her independence, and determination to go against conventions; a notion that Chopin further elaborated on in *The Awakening* (1899). In this controversial novel Chopin suggested that there was a connection between women´s quest for freedom and independence and the expression of their sensuousness and demand for sovereignty over their body. Interestingly enough, in both these works, the intra- and inter-personal situation of Chopin´s heroines is related to spatial settings. To establish the importance of the above mentioned themes for Chopin and the role spatial symbolism plays in conveying these issues, *The Awakening* will be briefly dealt with before we proceed to the analysis of "The Storm."

4.1 The Awakening

As Marilyn R. Chandler argues, *The Awakening* portrays Edna Pontellier´s "restless search for a place and a way of life in which she can be comfortable and free and in which she can be in relation to, but not controlled by, the men she loves."[143] Indeed, Elizabeth Ammons points out, Edna´s married life resembles the life of "the cursing birds [in their cage] that opens the

[142] Allen Stein, "The Kaleidoscope of Truth: A New Look at Chopin's 'The Storm,'" *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 36.1, Fall 2003: 55.
[143] Marilyn R. Chandler, "*The Awakening* and 'The Yellow Wallpaper:' Ironies of Independence," *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 121-2.

narrative;"[144] tellingly, the image of Mr. Pontellier and the caged birds is the first image of the novel, foreshadowing the "gilded cage"[145] into which he has enclosed his wife. Mr. Pontellier loves his luxuriously furnished house because it reminds him of his success: "[He] was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain […] after he had bought it and placed it among his household goods."[146] Among his "greatly valued possessions," which are, as Chandler puts it, "testimonies to his taste and his power as well as to his wealth,"[147] is also his wife. Mr. Pontellier expects his wife to be the most ornamental of his "household goods" – she should look and dress nicely, be sociable and well-mannered while giving dinners for their friends, ought to be a good housekeeper, and, of course, obey her husband. In short, she is supposed to conform to the restrictive Victorian ideal of a perfect woman.

However, Edna gradually realizes that this is not the life she wants. Her frustration with her social status as an "ornamental wife" is evident from the following extract: "She turned back into the room and began to walk to and fro down its whole length, without stopping, without resting. […] Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it."[148] Apparently, Edna´s sense of being trapped within her marriage is mirrored in her perception of the space she lives in as an oppressive space: walking "to and fro" in the limited space of the room, she resembles a wild animal nervously pacing in its cage. As Robert White points out, "Edna´s room and her wedding ring [...] are both images of her confinement within

[144] Elizabeth Ammons, "The Limits of Freedom: The Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Kate Chopin and Pauline Hopkins," *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn Into the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 73.
[145] Chandler, 121.
[146] Kate Chopin, "The Awakening," *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (East Rutherford: Viking Penguin, 1984) 99.
[147] Chandler, 126.
[148] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 103.

the domestic sphere circumscribed for her by her husband."[149] Clearly, for Edna, the house stands for her dependence on her husband: "The house, the money that provides for it are not mine,"[150] says Edna to Mademoiselle Reisz, as she is explaining to her why she has decided to move to the "little four-room house around the corner."[151] "I am tired looking after that big house," Edna continues, "it never seemed like mine, anyway – like home."[152] Consequently, yearning for a space that she could call her home and where she would be her own mistress, Edna moves to a house on Esplanade Street that her maid Ellen calls the "pigeon house."

As Chandler points out, "besides her final swim to her [probable] death," Edna´s move into the "pigeon house" is "the most definitive moment in [her] desperate struggle for identity and autonomy."[153] Having a space of her own enables Edna to find and express her own self; it gives her the strength to act as an independent individual:

> It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen to the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her own soul had invited her.[154]

Edna´s new house becomes for her a medium of self-assertion and empowerment. As Joseph R. Urgo claims, "Edna Pontellier progresses from a woman who appears to be muted, inarticulate, and incapable of telling a story to one in full possession of her own voice."[155]

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[149] Robert White, "Inner and Outer Space in *The Awakening*," *Mosaic*, 17:1, Winter 1984: 103.
[150] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 134.
[151] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 134.
[152] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 134.
[153] Chandler, 122.
[154] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 151.
[155] Joseph R. Urgo, "A Prologue to Rebellion: *The Awakening* and the Habit of Self-Expression, *Southern Literary Journal*, 20:1, Fall 1987: 22.

"The story which Edna needs to tell," Urgo continues, "is the story of her awakening body;"[156] it is the story of "the latent sensuality, which unfolded under [Alcée Arobin´s] delicate sense of her nature´s requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom,"[157] and which, as the text implies, Edna let Arobin fully unfold: "he did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties."[158] In other words, Edna manifests her newly-gained freedom and independence via the assertion of her sensuality; as Urgo claims, Edna´s awakening to her sexuality "emerges as a political event" since she "intellectually confronts the cultural 'realities' of her female body at the same textual moment when the reader must confront Edna´s intellect, as well as the decision she makes about the future of her body. For Edna demands, essentially, authority over her own body and what becomes of it."[159] Edna´s determination not to "belong to another than herself"[160] is evident from the scene depicting her reunion with Robert that is, symbolically, set in Edna´s new house.

In this scene, White observes, "the reversal of expected gender roles"[161] takes place: Robert "sat off in the shadow, leaning his head back on the chair as if in reverie;"[162] Edna "leaned over and kissed him – a soft, cool, delicate kiss whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being."[163] In their interaction, White explains, "Edna has assumed the assertive prerogative reserved to masculinity: she leads and Robert follows."[164] When Robert tells Edna that he refrained from confessing his love for her because she was married, and instead he dreamt of "wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free,"[165] Edna

[156] Urgo, 23.
[157] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 163.
[158] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 150.
[159] Urgo, 28-29.
[160] Chopin, *The Awakening*,135.
[161] White, 106.
[162] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 166.
[163] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 166.
[164] White, 106.
[165] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 167.

kisses him repeatedly, but says to him sternly: "You have been a very very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier´s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose."[166] Having found the space in which she can feel free and comfortable, Edna has gained the courage to be her own mistress and to voice and fulfil her desires.

Unfortunately, Robert is unable to accept Edna as an autonomous person: after she informs Robert that she is no man´s possession and that she herself will decide about her destiny, his reaction is described as follows: "His face grew a little white. 'What do you mean?'"[167] After this incident, Robert abandons Edna. As Carley Rees Bogard observes, Robert, "whose social and personal belief is Creole, can hardly be expected to choose Edna. He loves and wants Edna, but he cannot bring himself to join her in rebellion against the sacrament of marriage. Worse than that, he does not understand her; he cannot understand or believe that she can assume power over her own life."[168] Robert ignores Edna´s claims of independence and self-ownership; but at the same time, he is unable to ignore the claims of Victorian society upon him.

What is more, Edna realizes that she cannot find fulfilment in the casual affair with Arobin either; after she made love to him one night, "there was no despondency when she fell asleep […]; nor was there hope when she awoke in the morning."[169] In the end, Emily Toth points out, Edna "realizes that Arobin and Robert are both meaningless to her," and that "escaping through a man would simply be choosing the same avenue:"[170] "To-day it is

[166] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 167.
[167] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 167.
[168] Carley Rees Bogard, "*The Awakening*: A Refusal to Compromise," *The University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies* 2.3, 1977: 25.
[169] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 163.
[170] Emily Toth, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as Feminist Criticism," *Southern Studies* 2.3-4, Fall-Winter 1991: 238.

Arobin, tomorrow it will be some one else."[171] Not willing to compromise and to sacrifice herself, yet unable to think about a way she could sustain her existence other than through a man, Edna swims into the ocean. As Chandler argues:

> Edna is not of heroic stature; she is simply a woman with longings and needs common to women, caught in a social web where these needs are not met, but ill-equipped to spin her own web outside it. The new house is a refuge, but it is not enough. […] So her story ends […] in a symbolic act of self-destructive self-liberation. Unable to fashion a freer life by redefining or redesigning the structures that imprison her, she makes a final journey into a realm without walls, a place of endless, undefined space, fluidity, boundlessness, in which she can lose herself completely, free in the only way she knows how to achieve freedom from the restrictions of civilized life.[172]

Edna´s house did provide her with a sheltered space in which her autonomous identity could be developed; however, given the social and cultural situation of Edna´s time, her position in the society and some traits of her personality, the only space in which she could be really free was in the vast, impersonal mass of the ocean.

4.2 "The Storm:" Calixta as an Emancipated Woman

In *The Awakening*, Edna asserts her newly-found identity, autonomy and independence through her involvement in sensuous pleasures and her determination to decide what will become of her body. The notion that there is a link between women´s self-assertion and the assertion of their sexuality is also present in Chopin´s "The Storm," which features the strong, independent and defiant Calixta. However, in "The Storm," written a year before *The Awakening*, the outcome of its heroine´s sexual awakening is more optimistic.

From the beginning, Calixta is described as being far from exhibiting the "four cardinal virtues" that determined the late-nineteenth-century ideal of femininity – "piety, purity,

[171] Chopin, *The Awakening*, 163.
[172] Chandler, 138-9.

submissiveness and domesticity."[173] Rather, she may be seen as embodying Simone de Beauvoir's notion of the emancipated woman; that is, a woman who "insists on the active transcendence of a subject, the *pour soi*, rather than the passive immanence of an object, the *en soi;* and who attempts to achieve an existentialist authenticity through making a conscious choice, giving her own laws, realizing her essence, and making herself her own destiny."[174] In other words, Calixta is presented as a strong and independent woman who refuses to be limited by conventions or by what other people think about her.

In "At the ´Cadian Ball," a prequel to "The Storm" that depicts the formation of two prospective marriages – between Calixta and Bobinôt and Clarisse and Alcée Laballière, Calixta is distinguished from other Acadian girls who would "immediately be taken out to the mule-cart and driven home" if they "were to conduct"[175] themselves in the same manner as Calixta does. She is referred to as a "Spanish vixen" and we learn that "the Spanish that was in her blood" made her different from the rest of the prairie people and was the reason they "forgave her much that they would not have overlooked in their own daughters or sisters."[176] What is there to be forgiven is Calixta´s openly displayed sexuality that is repeatedly stressed throughout the story: "A gleam from Calixta´s eyes, a flash of her ankle, a twirl of her skirts," we are told, "could put the devil in [Alcée´s] head."[177] It is not only her would-be lover who is fully aware of Calixta´s sensuality; even her virtuous admirer, Bobinôt, is enchanted not by her whole being but rather by her particular physical attributes: "tantalizing eyes;" "flaxen hair;" "broad smiling mouth;" "full figure," and "a rich contralto voice" with "cadences in it

[173] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Summer 1966: 152.
[174] Per Seyersted, "A More Powerful Female Realism," *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, Louisiana State University Press* (1969) 110. [Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.]
[175] Kate Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (East Rutherford: Viking Penguin, 1984) 184.
[176] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 179.
[177] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 180.

that must have been taught by Satan."[178] What is more, "a breath of scandal"[179] was whispered about her after her trip to Assumption where she met Alcée. In short, Calixta is far from the pious and pure paragons of femininity cherished by Victorian moralists.

Calixta is also anything but an obedient "Angel in the House." In "At the ´Cadian Ball," she is admired for her "animation" and "flashes of wit;"[180] she exhibits verbal dexterity, swearing "roundly in fine ´Cadian French and with true Spanish spirit,"[181] and wittily chiding Bobinôt for standing "*planté là* like ole Ma´ame Tina´s cow in the bog."[182] What is more, in offering marriage to Bobinôt, Calixta assumes the role traditionally ascribed to men; indeed, confirming her decision, she is said to "hold her hand in the business-like manner of a man who clinches a bargain with a hand-clasp."[183] Of course, Calixta´s resolution to marry Bobinôt is a direct result of her being rejected by Alcée; still, it shows her determination to be the one who decides about her life and her body. This is evident from her reaction to Bobinôt´s claim on her body: "Bobinôt grew bold with happiness and asked Calixta to kiss him. […] 'I don´t want to kiss you, Bobinôt,' she said, turning away again, 'not to-day.'"[184] However, the most poignant evidence of Calixta´s defiance and determination to be her own mistress can be found in her sexual intercourse with Alcée that takes place in "The Storm."

4.3 The Meaning of Calixta´s and Alcée´s Encounter

Similarly to Edna Pontellier´s love affairs, Calixta´s passionate encounter with Alcée may be considered to be, as Martin Holz claims, "an outward manifestation of the protagonist´s

[178] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 179.
[179] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 179.
[180] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 184.
[181] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 179.
[182] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 184.
[183] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 187.
[184] Chopin, "At the ´Cadian Ball," 187.

development and resistance."[185] Indeed, analyzing Chopin´s fiction as a whole, Winfried Fluck comes to the conclusion that the motives of "social and sexual transgressions" are closely associated with the "recurring themes of female self-assertion:"[186] "The crossing and violation of a border line which separates the realm of cultural norms from a tabooed, forbidden, or simply unknown area," Fluck explains, may be seen as instrumental in overcoming "social restraints which restrict [women´s] development and self-fulfillment."[187] As Martha J. Cutter observes, "a patriarchal society denies women's right to control their destinies, their desires, and their discourses, and censors or erases female voices which do not conform to its dictates."[188] Therefore, Calixta´s more than willing involvement in sexual encounter and her ability to fulfill her desires despite conventions and restrictions of her time may be seen as a manifestation of her autonomy and sovereignty over her body. That "the search for selfhood and the satisfaction of desire," as Mary E. Papke puts it, "are presented as parts of a possible and positive process, despite what the social and moral commandments say,"[189] may be inferred from the way Calixta´s and Alcée´s intercourse is portrayed.

To begin with, their lovemaking is described as a life-giving and redeeming act: to Alcée´s eyes, Calixta is "a revelation" whose "firm, elastic flesh" resembling "a creamy lily that the sun invites its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world" is said to be "knowing for the first time its birthright."[190] As their passion reached its peak, "they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life´s mystery" (284). For Chopin, there is nothing

[185] Martin Holz, *The Function of Adultery, Contract and Female Identity in Kate Chopin´s The Awakening* (GRIN Verlag, 2008) 3.
[186] Winfried Fluck, "Tentative Transgressions: Kate Chopin´s Fiction as a Mode of Symbolic Action," *Studies in American Fiction,* 10:2, Autumn1982: 153.
[187] Fluck, 153-4.
[188] Martha J. Cutter, "Losing the Battle but Winning the War: Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 11.1, 1994: 33.
[189] Mary E. Papke, *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Function of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990)176.
[190] Kate Chopin, "The Storm," *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (East Rutherford: Viking Penguin, 1984) 284. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

wrong in sensuous pleasure if it is equally shared by both partners. Hence, Per Seyersted points out that in this work, sexuality "is neither frantic nor base, but as 'healthy' and beautiful as life itself,"[191] and Bernard Koloski believes that Chopin presents Calixta and Alcée as two people reaching for fulfillment "not selfishly," but "with a lust for life itself, with an ecstatic acceptance of what the moment is offering them, with trust and peace and hope."[192] Another aspect of the story that contributes to the impression that Chopin perceives Calixta´s affair as positive is its association with the storm of the title.

The storm is described as "sinister;" "sullen;" and "threatening" (281); at the same time, it is "ripping great furrows in the distant field" (281). As Stein argues, this image implies that "the storm is necessary to growth and thus, though frighteningly powerful, a great and good procreative force: dangerous but vital, and rich with wonderful possibilities - as might be the love-making which the storm engenders."[193] In the same vein, then, Stein continues, Calixta's lips are described as "red and moist as pomegranate seed," her eyes as "liquid" blue, and her face as "warm and steaming" (283-4): "all obviously conveying a sense of striking fecundity."[194] Further, as Calixta and Alcée lie together, they "[do] not heed the crashing torrents," and "the roar of the elements" (284) makes Calixta laugh; as Stein claims, this is a proof of how "at one with nature's fertile power" they feel to be. Thus, Stein concludes, "Chopin's seeming fusion of the fiercely beautiful power of nature with the fiercely beautiful power of sexual passion […] suggests that she looks favorably on Calixta´s and Alcee´s sudden interlude."[195]

This passionate intermezzo ends as the storm passes away: "The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery,

[191] Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969)168.
[192] Bernard Koloski, *Kate Chopin: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1996)76-77.
[193] Stein, 56.
[194] Stein, 56-7.
[195] Stein, 57.

watched Alcee ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud" (285). As Emily Toth puts it, their passion is described as "mutual power and desire – laughing, generous, mysterious. […] No guilt disturbs them, and no deception."[196] Significantly, Toth adds, "'At the ´Cadian Ball' takes place during a warm dark night, while the second is a daring daylight tryst, in much bolder language."[197] The most persuasive evidence that Chopin´s view of Calixta´s and Alcée´s lovemaking is positive, however, is the last sentence of the story: "so the storm passed and every one was happy" (286). As Stein observes, this sentence "makes the adulterous passion seem nothing less than a brief though necessary life-giving escape from the sterile and endless round of the routine. Perhaps such brief escapes might even redeem the commonplace for the transgressors by making it more endurable."[198] Thus, it can be said that, similar to *The Awakening*, fulfillment of sensuous desires on the part of a woman is in "The Storm" presented as a token of the woman´s self-assertion. However, the outcome of the woman´s involvement in sensual pleasures is in "The Storm" shown as much more positive and beneficial than the sexual awakening of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*.

Still, even in "The Storm," the role of sexual awakening in women´s emancipation is limited. "As [Calixta and Alcée] embrace," Christopher Baker observes, "the narrator adopts Alcee´s point of view:"[199] it was to Alcée´s eyes that Calixta was "a revelation" (284); it was Alcée who perceived Calixta´s passion as "a white flame" (284) and her mouth as "a fountain of delight" (284). In preferring the male point of view to the female one, Chopin partially undermines her heroine´s liberation; as if in anticipation of Edna´s tragedy. Calixta´s liberation through sexual intercourse is further limited by the fact that this act takes place

[196] Emily Toth, *Unveiling Kate Chopin* (University Press of Mississippi, 1999) 205.
[197] Toth, 206.
[198] Stein, 63.
[199] Christopher Baker, "Chopin´s The storm," *Explicator*, 52:4, Summer 1994: 225.

under her husband´s roof; as we will see in the following paragraphs, Calixta´s house is not her own even though she makes it seem that way through her actions.

4.4 Spatial Setting

In *The Awakening*, the "fulfilment of sensuous desires" takes place only after Edna moves from her husband´s house to her own house; consequently, Edna´s gaining a space of her own may be seen as a crucial point in her search for identity and independence. In "The Storm," the spatial setting plays an important role as well, but it is utilized differently: it is there to mirror and emphasize Calixta´s self-confidence, autonomy and defiance. Hence, in the last part of this chapter, attention will be paid to the way Calixta´s living space and her relationship to it are described in the story.

In "The Storm," Calixta is referred to as "an over-scrupulous housewife" (285). When we first meet her in this story, she is "sewing [so] furiously on a sewing machine" that she "[does] not notice the approaching storm" (281). She is repeatedly shown as doing various household chores: besides sewing, she is gathering Bobinôt´s and Bibi´s clothes so that they do not get wet, "preparing" supper, "setting the table and dripping coffee at the hearth" (285). She seems to be performing all these tasks naturally, with perfect ease; it is no drudgery for her. In fact, tending to her household seems to soothe her nerves: attempting to hide her nervousness from Alcée, she cleans the floor covered with "the lengths of cotton sheet which she had been sewing" (283); looking out of the window at the raging storm, she "wipe[s] the frame clouded with moisture" (283) to calm herself. Sweeping, dusting, brushing, washing, mending, cooking, Calixta gains intimate knowledge of her home, which endows her with self-assurance. She is clearly in charge of her household; unlike Gilman´s heroine, who is denied the right to decide about anything that is going on in the house, which distorts her relationship to the space she stays in, or unlike Edna who, as an upper-middle class wife, is

dependent on the work of Mr. Pontellier´s servants. Calixta designs and orders her living space in a way comfortable to her, although, presumably, the house is owned by her husband.

What is more, unlike the narrators of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *The House on Mango Street*, Calixta seems to have a room of her own. After Alcée enters the house, they are reported to be "in the dining room – the sitting room – the general utility room" (282). Next to this room is "her bed room, with Bibi´s couch along side her own. The door stood open, and the room with its white, monumental bed, its closed shutters, looked dim and mysterious" (282-3). What is important here is the fact that although the house as such is in the possession of Calixta´s husband, the bedroom is *hers*; it is not her and Bobinôt´s room, not theirs, only hers. She does not have to share her bedroom with her husband; it is her own private space, free of the imposing presence of any man except her little son. The "closed shutters" (which she closed herself after she had noticed the storm) imply that it is a space where she can hide from the outside world if she wants to; at the same time, the opened door ensures us that it is no prison room – she can enter and leave whenever she desires. Twice is the room described as "mysterious" (283, 284), which directs our attention to the "life´s mystery" (284) discovered by Calixta and Alcée at the height of their passion. Obviously, Calixta´s bedroom is not a space of oppression; on the contrary, it is a space where desires are freely voiced and fulfilled.

Similarly, Calixta´s bed is far from being the symbol of male sexual privilege and dominance as is the bed of Gilman´s protagonist. As with her room, it is implied that Calixta does not have to share her bed with Bobinôt; hence, it may be inferred that she retains sovereignty over her body, manifested already in the conclusion of "At the ´Cadian Ball." The only man with whom she shares this intimate space, then, is her son – innocent and harmless. This absence of the sexually dominant and aggressive male element in the space of Calixta´s bedroom can be said to be emphasized by the whiteness of her bed.

As the physician A. B. Evarts points out, white color is traditionally connected with the female rather than the male principle.[200] That the white color is in "The Storm" connected with female element may be further inferred from Calixta´s being consistently associated with this color: she is wearing a "white sacque" (282); she "was a revelation […] as white as the couch she lay upon" (284), and the "generous abundance of her passion […] was like a white flame" (284). Thus, the whiteness of Calixta´s bed may be said to imply the dominance of female principle in the space of her bedroom. The association of white with feminine sexuality and fecundity is further enhanced through the images of flowers utilized to emphasize Calixta´s sensuousness.

As Baker observes, Chopin uses the image of a "creamy lily" to convey Calixta´s intense passion: "Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright," the narrator says, "was like a creamy lily" (284). "The floral imagery," Baker argues, "extends into Calixta´s name, which suggests *calyx*, the botanical term for the outer, protective covering immediately enveloping the flower proper."[201] Consequently, Baker argues, "Calixta´s name underscores her sexuality by enhancing a structural metaphor at the heart of the story, in which her sexual receptivity to Alcee parallels the opening of a flower:"[202]

> As a floral calyx unfolds its protective sepals to present the flower, Calixta has opened to receive sexual and emotional fulfillment "for the first time" in an atmosphere of natural fecundity. Her name suggests that in her moment of love, her identity becomes

[200] Virgil relates how the god Pan, white as snow, seduced the moon. Pan was the universal fecundating principle of nature and the moon was the universal female principle. Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris, was also the moon, and the universal mother. In the parable which is analyzed by Silberer, the wanderer killed the fierce lion and found himself possessed of his red blood and white bones. Going further he encountered a most beautiful maiden arrayed in white satin leaning upon the arm of a stately youth clothed in scarlet. As the parable unfolds the woman clothed in white satin for her bridal becomes the sister-mother-wife of the wanderer, or again the universal female principle as he was the universal male principal. (A. B. Evarts, "Color Symbolism," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 6, 1919: 131-2.)

[201] Baker, 225.

[202] Baker, 225.

> one with the unfolding reproductive power of nature itself and part of the "glistening green world" which, by the story´s close, the sun had made "a palace of gems."[203]

Once again, the white color, this time mediated through the flowery imagery, denotes the space Calixta lives in as a space that is free from male sexual dominance, and is thus conducive to the development of female sexuality.

Finally, the connotations that the house evokes in the reader are predominantly positive ones for the house is described as a loyal guardian of the lovers. The storm is a particularly violent one: "The playing of the lightning was incessant. A bolt struck a tall chinaberry tree. It filled all visible space with a blinding glare and the crash seemed to invade the very boards they stood upon" (282-3). Although the house is shaken to its foundations, it yields nothing to the storm, persistently and faithfully protecting its inhabitants. It provides Calixta and Alcée with a safe shelter for their lovemaking until "the growl of the thunder" passes away and "the rain beat[ing] softly upon the shingles, invit[es] them to drowsiness and sleep" (284-5). Consequently, the space of the house may be seen as Bachelard´s "felicitous space" – "the space we love," the space that "defends [us] against adverse forces."[204]

To sum up, it has been demonstrated that in *The Awakening*, Edna´s development from an ornamental wife to a free and autonomous individual is paralleled by her movement at first from her husband´s house to the "pigeon house" and then by her plunge into the limitless space of the ocean. Similarly, in "The Storm," Calixta´s independence, defiance and self-confidence are intertwined with the story´s spatial imagery: there are no indicators of oppression; on the contrary, even though Calixta lives in her husband´s house, she has her own room and the way its furnishing is described suggests that her living space is favorable to the development of her personality. In short, Calixta can call the space she lives in her home

[203] Baker, 225-6.
[204] *Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) xxxv.

5. Louise Erdrich´s *Love Medicine*

Louise Erdrich´s 1984 novel *Love Medicine*, which explores fifty years in the lives of a small group of Chippewa living on a North Dakota reservation, is organized around a love triangle between Nector Kashpaw, his wife Marie and his lover Lulu Lamartine. The power struggle ensuing from this configuration reveals the novel´s feminist orientation as the victorious and more powerful characters are eventually the female ones. Unlike Nector, who wavers between Lulu and Marie, the two women always know where their home is; consequently, the aim of this chapter will be to demonstrate that the strength of these two paramount female figures stems from their being firmly set in their homes. In this respect, they may be compared with Chopin´s Calixta. Moreover, these women´s healthy relationships to their living spaces stand in marked contrast to that of Gilman´s and Cisneros´s disempowered female characters.

5.1 The Novel´s "Home-destroyers:" Nector Kashpaw

To begin with, although there are several strong male characters, such as Eli Kashpaw or Gerry Nanapush, Erdrich´s novel is populated by weak and ineffectual male characters, be it the cowardly King Kashpaw, who repeatedly beats his wife and lies about his combat experience, Gordie Kashpaw, who drowns his grief following June´s death in alcohol, Henry Junior, whom the horror he experienced in Vietnam drives to suicide, or Lipsha Morrissey, about whom his grandmother says that he is "the biggest waste on the reservation."[205] These men seem to further complicate rather than contribute to women´s everyday effort to create safe and healthy homes for their families.

[205] Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) 189. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

The conflict between male and female elements is symbolically treated in the first chapter of the book. When all the Kashpaws gather to mourn June´s death, the women of the family bake pies from preserved fruits; as Nichole E. Moreau explains, "preserved fruits represent the preservation of a way of life, inasmuch as native people, often the women, gathered and dried fruits and berries for winter use."[206] Significantly, this "'love medicine' between the female Kashpaws"[207] is destroyed as the male members of the family fight. "I spooned the fillings back into the crusts, married slabs of dough, smoothed over edges of crusts with a wetted finger […]" (39), Albertine tells us, but nothing worked: "once they smash there is no way to put them right" (39). Unlike, or rather despite, the men, the women on the reservation, as Thomas Matchie points out, "keep the family intact, in spite of the alcohol, the violence, the abuse and misuse of one another."[208] Consequently, it may be argued that the men are portrayed as "home-destroyers," whereas the women are presented as "home-makers." The most prominent of the "home-makers" are Marie and Lulu; a long time divided by the figure of Nector, who can be seen as the most conspicuous of the novel´s "home-destroyers."

As Louise Flavin puts it, Nector most poignantly "exemplifies the ineffectuality of male leadership on the reservation."[209] Being a tribal chairman, he becomes an important man on the reservation; however, he would be nothing without Marie, who nominates him and keeps him away from drinking so that he can perform his duties. "I´d known from the beginning I had married a man with brains," Marie tells us. "But the brains wouldn´t matter unless I kept him from the bottle. […] I had decided I was going to make him into something big on this reservation" (66). Indeed, Nector hardly ever makes decisions about his life; he instead lets others decide for him. When he meets Marie coming down the hill from the convent with

[206] Nichole E. Moreau, "Erdrich's Love Medicine," *The Explicator* 61.4, 2003: 251.
[207] Moreau, 251.
[208] Thomas Matchie, "*Love Medicine:* A Female *Moby Dick*," *The Midwest Quarterly* 30.4, Summer 1989: 482.
[209] Louise Flavin, "Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*: Over Time and Distance," *Critique* 31.1, Fall 1989: 59.

what he believes are stolen altar linens, he plans on stopping her and returning the valuables to the Sisters. Nevertheless, he ends up having sex with Marie and commits himself to marriage with her; yet, he refuses to take responsibility for his actions. Instead, he says, "And then I am caught, I give way. I cannot help myself" (61). He tells Marie, "You made me! You forced me!" (62). Nector simply goes with the flow: "I´d hold my breath when I hit and let the current pull me toward the surface, around jagged rocks. I wouldn´t fight it, in that way I´d get to shore" (91).

Nector´s weakness and indecisiveness are aptly demonstrated on his wavering between Marie and Lulu; for five years is he unable to choose between the women of his life: "It seems as though, all my life up till now, I have not had to make a decision. […] But now it is one or the other, and my mind can´t stretch far enough to understand this" (106). Eventually, Nector decides to leave Marie for Lulu, writing a letter to both of them. The first letter hurts Marie deeply, and in trying to burn the second one, addressed to Lulu, Nector sets fire to her house. Clearly, it is an accident; yet, true to his character, Nector denies any responsibility: "I swear that I do nothing to help the fire along. […] The fire is unstoppable. The windows are a furnace. They pop out, raining glass, but I merely close my eyes and am untouched. I have done nothing" (109). After that he sheepishly returns to Marie, gradually growing old and losing his wits; as Lulu says, "he never fought. So when his senses started slipping he let them dribble out" (229). In the end, he chokes to death on turkey hearts, "love medicine" Marie gives him to make him stop "hanker[ing] after" (198) Lulu. Symbolically, even after his death, Nector is said to visit both his women; clearly, he is still unable to make up his mind.

Nector´s oscillation between Marie´s and Lulu´s households may be seen as a partial reason for his failure: unlike these two women, who are firmly set in their homes, Nector is never sure where his home is. Additionally, Nector is not only unable to find his own home, but he can also be seen as a disruptive force: his decision to live with Lulu hurts Marie,

throwing off the carefully maintained balance of her household, and he quite literally destroys Lulu´s house by burning it down. Finally, for decades, he keeps Marie and Lulu apart.

The two women are the novel´s most important mother figures and home providers. This status of theirs is impressed upon the reader when Lipsha compares his grandmother with Lulu Lamartine; the metaphor he uses is based on the image of a house:

> Now Lamartine was about half the considerable size of Grandma, but you would never think of sizes anyway. They were different in an even more noticeable way. It was the difference between a house fixed up with paint and picky fence, and a house left to weather away into the soft earth, is what I´m saying. Lamartine was jacked up, latticed, shuttered and vinyl sided, while Grandma sagged and bulged on her slipped foundations and let her hair go the silver gray of rain-dried lumber. (196)

Unlike Nector, who is weak, floundering and wavering between two households, Marie and Lulu are strong and independent women whose self-confidence stems from knowing where their home is. Hence, in the following paragraphs, the relation of these female characters to the space they inhabit will be dealt with; at first, attention is going to be paid to Marie.

5.2 The Novel´s "Home-Makers:" Marie Kashpaw

As Nora Barry and Marie Prescott assert, Marie "is one of Erdrich's strongest characters."[210] Her identity as a "powerful survivor,"[211] as Karla Sanders puts it, is revealed in her combat with Sister Leopolda, out of which the former emerges victoriously as "Saint Marie" (54), revered by the Sisters of the convent. "Planted solid as a tree," as Nector describes his future wife, "the kind of tree that doubles back and springs up, whips singing" (59), Marie further proves her iron will and invincibility as she makes Nector a tribal chairman. As Lulu puts it, Nector owes his wife for all he has achieved "Nector Kashpaw was awkward and vain in his

[210] Nora Barry and Mary Prescott, "The Triumph of the Brave," *Critique* 30.2, Winter 1989: 124.
[211] Karla Sanders, "A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine," *MELUS,* Summer 1998: 131.

green youth. It took Marie to grow him up" (228). Apparently, Marie is an unyielding and powerful woman.

Moreover, Marie is presented as one of the two most prominent mother figures in the novel. As Matchie observes, "Marie is a homemaker and protector:"[212] unlike Gilman´s narrator, who was deprived of the presence of her newly-born child, Marie not only nurtures her own children, but also shelters and protects other people´s children, the daughter of her sister, June, and later her son Lipsha Morrissey among them. "They were all over in the house once they started," Nector says about all the babies Marie has taken care of. "In the bottoms of cupboards, in the dresser, in trundles. Lift a blanket and a bundle would howl beneath it. I lost track of which were ours and which Marie had taken in" (93). As Flavin states, "Marie is the embodiment of the saintly virtues of compassion, forgiveness, and love. […] Her saintliness lies not in deprivation and asceticism, nor in the self-promoting sadomasochism of Sister Leopolda, but in the humane everyday acts of caring for others."[213] Indeed, even her long-life rival, Lulu, is forgiven in the end as Marie nurses her after her operation. In this way, Marie is established both as a mother figure and a powerful survival figure; in the following passages, it will be suggested that this identity of hers has mostly been formed and developed through her relation to her home.

5.3 Marie´s Relationship to Her House

As Jonathan Max Wilson observes, Marie "takes charge of her home at every inter-section."[214] She keeps her household scrupulously clean and neat, and decides about its furnishing. She changes the course of Nector´s personal life, and plans his involvement in the

[212] Matchie, 482.
[213] Flavin, 63.
[214] Jonathan Max Wilson, *Native Spaces of Continuation, Preservation, and Belonging: Louise Erdrich´s Concepts of Home* (Arlington: The University of Texas, 2008) 135.

life of the community. She brings all her children up in the way she believes is the right one so that when they grow up, she can say about them that they are "well behaved" and "educated too" (113). She is firm and strict: when June called her "damn old bitch," Marie "grabbed [her] jaw and packed a handful of soap flakes in her mouth. None of my children ever called me [Marie] a bad name before" (68). At the same time, she can be loving and understanding; when June tells her that she wants to live with Eli, Marie accepts her decision: "It was a mother she couldn´t trust after what had happened in the woods. But Eli was different. He could chew pine sap too" (70). Accordingly, for her husband and children, Marie is the embodiment of the warmth and safety of their home. As Nector confides to the reader:

> She always sleeps on her side, back toward me, curved around the baby, which is next to the wall so it won´t tumble off. She sleeps like this ever since I rolled over on one of them. […] I want to clutch her and never let her go, to cry to her and tell her what I´ve done. […] And then my body becomes her body. We are breathing as one, and I am falling gently into sleep still not knowing what will happen. (106)

For Nector, Marie represents a safe harbor awaiting him as he is sailing through the turbulent sea of his life. Similarly, the children find shelter and protection in Marie herself, in her body. That Marie is identified with her children´s idea of home is further evident from Lipsha´s impression of Marie after Nector´s death: "Grandma got back into the room and I saw her stumble. And then she went down too. It was like a house you can´t hardly believe has stood so long" (209). However, it is not only her family that perceives Marie and the house, i.e. their home, as being one entity; Marie herself develops her identity in respect to her house.

In "The Beads" Marie tells us that she let the children play in the woods because she "liked the house to [her]self" (66); being alone in her house, undisturbed, feeling safe and comfortable, Marie "could think" (66) about her and her husband´s future. Interestingly, Marie´s reflection on her situation seems to be sustained by her tending to her household: "I worked hard but I let my thoughts run out like water from a dam. I was churning and thinking

that day. With each stroke of my dasher I progressed in thinking what to make of Nector" (66). Similarly, after she finds out that Nector has decided to leave her for Lulu, Marie commences to peel potatoes: "It was calming to remove the rough skin, the eye sprouts, and get down to the smooth whiteness" (126). As with Calixta in Chopin´s "The Storm," performing household chores seems to soothe Marie´s nerves; it helps her to gain some perspective, realize her own situation, and decide what to do next. This calming effect may be said to stem from Marie´s sense of being able to appropriate the space she lives in through the performance of household chores: having her floor "washed" (64), "shined" and "waxed" (127-8), getting "up early" so that she can start "canning apples," (106), "churning" (66), and preparing her husband "galette" (106) help her establish the sense of being in charge of her household that is so important for her self-confidence. This is evident as she attempts to re-gain her balance after finding Nector´s letter through cleaning her linoleum floor.

As we are told, Marie is proud of her linoleum: "It was one of my prides to keep that floor shined up. Under the gray swirls and spots and leaves of the pattern, I knew there was tar paper and bare wood that could splinter a baby´s feet, I knew, because I bought and paid for and put down that linoleum myself" (127). She has bought the linoleum in order to protect her beloved children; hence, the linoleum is there to reinforce Marie´s status as a nurturing mother figure. At the same time, unlike the linoleum in Cisneros´s novella, which is utilized to symbolize Sally´s entrapment and drudgery, Marie´s linoleum distinguishes her as a strong survival figure: Marie has managed to lay the linoleum herself, without the help of her husband, and now, scrubbing and waxing it, she realizes that she is not only strong enough to cover her floor without him but that she is also strong enough to lead her life on her own. "I never went down on my knees to God or anyone," Marie says, "so maybe washing my floor was an excuse to kneel that night. I felt better, that´s all I know, as I scrubbed off the tarnished wax and dirt. I felt better as I recognized myself in the woman who kept her floor clean even

when left by her husband" (128). Since Marie´s sense of integrity is so firmly connected with her sense of belonging to her home, being able to keep her household in order makes her believe that she will be able to keep her life in order as well. As Sanders puts it, "by overcoming this trial in her life, Marie gains a sense of herself as a person separate from Nector."[215] Scrubbing her floor, Marie re-appropriates her household, an action tremendously important in her effort to establish her autonomy. After being in charge of her household again, she symbolically uses kitchen utensils to regain her power over Nector.

In the chapter titled "Flesh and Blood," Moreau observes, "Marie conducts a love medicine ceremony using kitchen items as symbols for people, events, and rituals. After learning of Nector's affair through a note he leaves under the sugar jar, she restores balance and reclaims her husband by carefully considering and then manipulating the symbolic items:"[216] "The box of spoons. The butter plate. The can of salt. Somehow these things looked more full of special meaning than the sugar jar. It was just smooth clear glass, decent and familiar in the sunlight, half full" (124). As Moreau explains, each of these things stand for some event in Marie´s life: "Because she was delivered with spoons instead of forceps, the box of spoons represents her birth. As a result of Nector's affair with Lulu, the empty butter plate symbolizes the butter she never received."[217] The can of salt may represent Marie: after Nector chooses Marie over Lulu, he says of Marie, "her taste was bitter. I craved the difference after all those years of easy sweetness" (92). Significantly, salt is essential for one´s survival. The sugar jar, on the other hand, might stand for Lulu; she is repeatedly associated with sweetness: eating a slice of bread with butter, she is said to "have sprinkled a teaspoon of sugar over it" (81); living at the Senior-Citizens, Lulu gives Nector candy although it might kill him, considering his state of health. "As an indication of a pleasure that

[215] Sanders, 138.
[216] Moreau, 248.
[217] Moreau, 248.

would not last," Moreau adds, "the sugar jar is only 'half-full.'"[218] At the end of this chapter, Moreau says, "Marie ceremoniously moves these symbolic objects into a desired order to complete the ritual. She moves the note from the sugar jar to the salt can, thereby regaining Nector from Lulu and recovering her power by putting herself above Nector:" "I folded the letter up," Marie recollects, "exactly as it had been found, and I put it beneath the salt can. I did this for a reason. I would never talk about this letter but instead let him wonder, sometimes he´d look at me, I´d smile, and he´d think to himself: salt or sugar? But he would never be sure" (129). The fact that Marie uses kitchen items to bind Nector to herself can be considered emblematic of the above demonstrated assumption that Marie´s strength stems from her identification with and dominance over her household.

5.4 Lulu Lamartine as an "Earth Goddess"

Another female character for whom the relationship to the space she inhabits plays an essential role is Marie´s life-long rival, Lulu. As Sanders points out, Lulu is the second of the two "powerful matriarchs"[219] depicted in *Love Medicine*; she draws her "strength and a sense of belonging from the community of nature. […] She is presented as an earth goddess figure encompassing everything, at one with the forces of nature. […] To others she seems magical […]. Lulu´s embracing the world and her magical aura show her connection to the traditional heritage." As Paula Gunn Allen explains, "the concept of power among tribal people is related to their understanding of the relationships that occur between the human and nonhuman worlds. They believe that all are linked within one vast, living sphere, that the linkage is not material but spiritual, and that its essence is the power that enables magical things to

[218] Moreau, 249.
[219] Sanders, 138.

happen."[220] Quoting Patricia Clark Smith, Sanders further suggests that Lulu´s sense of inclusion gives her power and identity: "The vibrant, strongly self-aware Lulu is the best illustration that dissolving physical boundaries can strengthen identity […]. Totally receptive to the natural world, Lulu physically and spiritually opens herself to it all […]."[221] In other words, Sanders concludes, "Lulu displays the sense of the transpersonal […] by achieving a healthy balance and dispelling ambivalence through this embrace of the natural world. This embrace is closely connected to her sexuality, which empowers Lulu."[222] Indeed, in a chapter called "The Good Tears," Lulu says, "I´m going to tell you about the men. There were times I let them in just for being part of the world" (217). If we accept the character of Lulu as an "earth goddess figure," mysteriously magical, overwhelmingly feminine and embodying the traditional heritage, we can consider her house as her "sacred temple."

5.5 Lulu´s "Sacred Temple"

Like Marie and Chopin´s Calixta, Lulu is a good housekeeper, and her place is always meticulously clean and orderly. Her house is "fresh painted, yellow with black trim, cheerful as a bee. Her petunias are set out front in two old tractor tires painted white" (107). Although there are eight boys growing up in her house, Beverly, her late husband´s brother, notices that "her house was neat as a pin. The candy bowl on the table sat precisely on its doily. All her furniture was brushed and straightened. Her coffee table held a neat stack of *Fate* and *True Adventure* magazines" (81). What is more, her boys respect her unreservedly: "Lulu managed to make the younger boys obey perfectly, Beverly observes, "while the older ones adored her to the point that they did not tolerate anything less from anyone else" (85). As Wilson claims,

[220] Sanders, 139 [Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) 22.].
[221] Sanders, 139 [Patricia Clark Smith, "Concerning Power, Nuclear and Otherwise: A Response to Ellen Messer-Davidow, *New Literary History* 19.1, Autumn 1987: 18.].
[222] Sanders, 139.

"in her own right, Lulu, much like Marie, defines and constructs her version of home through experience and reliance of her individual power to contort the wills of others to her own."[223] Apparently, Lulu dominates the space she inhabits; it is her domain. As we will see in the following paragraph, it is also a space that is conducive to the development of her "mysterious powers."

In "The Good Tears," Lulu describes her feelings of being in harmony with nature and its beauty:

> I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms. Sometimes I´d look out on my yard and the green leaves would be glowing. I´d see the oil slick on the wing of a grackle. […] Then I´d open my mouth wide, my ears wide, my heart, and I´d let everything inside. After some time I´d swing my door shut and walk back into the house with my eyes closed. I´d sit there like that in my house. I´d sit there with my eyes closed on beauty […]. (216)

Tellingly, it is in the protective and sheltered space of *her* house that Lulu can contemplate and benefit from her enriching relationship towards natural world. Lulu feels so comfortable in her house that watching her performing her everyday duties in the kitchen, Beverly perceives her movements as pure magic: "Lulu was bustling about the kitchen in a calm, automatic frenzy. She seemed to fill pots with food by pointing at them and take things from the oven that she´d never put in. The table jumped to set itself. The pop foamed into glasses, and the milk sighed to the lip" (86). After making love to Beverly (it is important to note here that the lovemaking was initiated by Lulu, and that it served her to gain power over Beverly, leaving him "helpless" (86) and "exposed" (83).), Lulu is said to retreat into

> the sacred domain of her femininity. That was the bedroom with the locking door that she left open just a crack. She pulled down the blue-and-white-checked bedspread, put the pillows aside, and lay down carefully with her hands folded on her stomach. She

[223] Wilson, 139.

> closed her eyes and breathed deep. She went into herself, sinking through her body as if on a raft of darkness, until she reached the very bottom of her soul where there was nothing to do but wait. (87)

In this way, Lulu transforms her house into a secret haven of feminine power. Indeed, Lulu´s boys are the only men allowed to enter her kingdom.

For her beloved boys, Lulu creates a proper home filled with love; however, she never lets any of her lovers invade her territory. Henry Lamartine was her lawful husband, but he did not father any of her sons and eventually, "he parked his Dodge square on the tracks and let the train bear down" (125) because Lulu did not return his love. The fathers of her sons, on the other hand, are never invited to take part in their children´s upbringing. Lulu intends to marry Beverly Lamartine, but she never confirms that he is the father of Henry Junior, thus keeping the boy for herself. Most conspicuously, she does not even allow Nector, the love of her life, to fully participate in her life. In "The Plunge of the Brave," Nector recollects that Lulu "never did admit that she was carrying. […] she frightened me from asking if the baby was mine" (101). True to her character, Lulu never supports Nector´s conviction that Lyman is his son. Characteristically, during the five years in which Nector was Lulu´s lover, Nector never entered her house through the front door; he used to visit her in "the dead of night" (218), "climbing in her bedroom window" (100). Symbolically, Nector´s only attempt to go into Lulu´s house through the front door, after he decides to leave Marie for her, ends up tragically – he sets fire to Lulu´s house by mistake.

The importance of having a space of her own for Lulu is further evident from her courageous fight for her house. After Nector, as a tribal chairman, signs the documents entitling the tribe to move Lulu out of the land on which her house is built, she gives him up. However, she will not give up her house. As Sanders observes, "Lulu finds her own public voice as she speaks out against the tribe´s decision," using "her boys´ paternity as a weapon of

knowledge and the law against the tribe:" "'I´ll name all of them,' I offered in a very soft voice. 'The fathers… I´ll point them out for you right here.' […] Before I´d move the Lamartine household I´d hit the tribe with a fistful of paternity suits that would make their heads spin" (224). "Just as Marie uses silence to gain power over Nector," Sanders remarks, "Lulu wields power by withholding the names of the fathers […]."[224] In this scene, Wilson argues, Lulu is depicted as a "powerful, independent woman, who, through her children, the offspring of her numerous sexual liaisons, ties herself to a majority of tribal families, which, in turn, bestows to her the potency to control situations and events to her liking."[225] In other words, it is Lulu´s unrestrained sexuality that paradoxically empowers her in this conflict. Interestingly, the connection between women´s empowerment and the assertion of their sexuality is what Chopin´s Edna Pontellier and Calixta share with Erdrich´s Lulu. From the recurrence of this issue may be inferred that the assertion of women´s sexuality is seen by these authors as an act of defiance against and liberation from male demands on women´s bodies, and, consequently, their lives.

What is more, fighting for her house helps Lulu realize the value of her heritage. She is not only concerned about losing her house, but she also refuses to leave the land she believes is hers:

> Oh, they said they´d move [the house]. Sure they did. How many times did we move? The Chippewas had started off way on the other side of the five great lakes. How we were shoved out of this lonesome knob of prairie my grandmother used to tell. It is too long a story to get into now. Let´s just say that I refused to move one foot farther west. I was very much intent to stay where I was. (222)

"For Lulu," Lorena L. Stookey explains, "the land is the site of the place where [she] belong[s]. The place where home, family, community, and memory significantly define a

[224] Sanders, 140.
[225] Wilson, 140.

relation to the world."[226] Consequently, it is unacceptable to Lulu that her land should be sold to a manufacturer of "keepsake things like bangle beads and plastic war clubs" (223). To Lulu, fully aware of the threat the factory represents to the old way of life, it is all "a load of foolishness;" "dreamstuff" and "equipment of false value" (223). As Barry and Prescott put it, Lulu "seems mindful of the conflict between the old values and the influences of the white standard of economic success:"[227] "Indian against Indian, that´s how the government´s money offer made us act. Here was the government Indians ordering their own people off the land of their forefathers to build a modern factory" (223). Fighting for her house, attempting to protect the space she perceives as her own, Lulu becomes aware of the importance of preserving the traditional way of life; an awareness for which she will be later appreciated. Unfortunately, all her efforts are in vain since only a few days later her house burns down.

5.6. The Destruction of Lulu´s "Sacred Temple"

Symbolically, it is Nector, the novel´s most prominent "home-destroyer," who inadvertently sets fire to Lulu´s house. Perhaps drawing upon the notion that long hair can be seen as a symbol of strength and vitality, Erdrich tells us that Lulu´s "dark and thickly curled hair burnt off when her house caught fire, and it never grew back" (83). Losing her house, the "sacred domain of her femininity," Lulu loses an essential part of herself: "My house was burning in [Nector´s] eyes, and I was trapped there, alone, on fire with my own fire" (225). The depth of Lulu´s identification with her house suggests the extent to which Lulu´s personality was formed in respect to the space she inhabited.

[226] Lorena L. Stookey, *Louise Erdrich: A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood Press, 1999) 46.
[227] Barry and Prescott, 235.

For two months after the fire, not wanting to leave the place, Lulu and her boys live "on the very spot where the house had stood" in "a shack made out of bent sheets of tin siding, busted boards, burnt wood" (227). Eventually, the government builds Lulu a "crackerbox house" on "a strip of land rightfully repurchased from a white farmer" (227). "That land was better than Henry´s, even, with a view overlooking town" (227) Lulu says, but the house is full of "junk other people pawned off on [her]. Bouquets of plastic flowers that looked like they´d faded over graves, dishes of stained green plastic, clothes that went for a quarter in the Bundles" (229). Besides, the house is all the time crowded with "wives and children, in-laws, cousins;" it becomes "a regular nest of Lamartines" (229). Clearly, at that time, Lulu does not have a space that she could call her own, the intimacy she felt to her previous house has not been restored. Significantly, this period of Lulu´s life does not seem to be a particularly important or happy one: it is described in only a few paragraphs, and it is a time during which Gerry is "in and out of prison" (227), and Henry Junior commits suicide. This changes after Lulu moves into the Senior Citizens.

Tellingly, it is only after Lulu moves into her "little two-room" flat, which she finally furnishes and decorates the way she likes it that "the second half of [her] story starts" (229):

> I bought pictures of trees, dancers, wolves and John Kennedy. I bought the classic called *Plunge of the Brave*, which everyone had whether they liked Kashpaw and wanted to venerate his youth, or did not like him and therefore made fun of his naked leap. My boys went in together and bought me furniture. A matching set. And then, after my new plush rocker was set in the middle of the room, after they brought in my radio and straightened the place around, […] I sat there. I felt the liquid golden last days of my oats. (229)

Indeed, it is only after Lulu renews the intimate relationship she once had to the house burnt down by Nector to the space she inhabits in the Senior Citizens that her path to becoming "an old-time traditional" (268) may begin.

5.7 The Importance of Women´s Alliance for the Welfare of the Community

Lulu´s quest may be accomplished only after she finds her way to Marie, and these two "powerful grandmothers"[228] become allies. Significantly, the novel´s most potent mother figures can come together only after Nector dies. Their reconciliation occurs as Marie is helping Lulu to recover from cataract surgery. Lulu recollects: "'I appreciate you coming here to help me get my vision,' I said. 'But the truth is I have no regrets.' 'That´s alright.' She was almost impersonal in her kindness" (236). After that the women just sit there, mourning Nector in silence, knowing that words might disarray the laboriously achieved balance. Sharing her grief with Marie, Lulu comes to a revelation: "For the first time I saw exactly how another woman felt, and it gave me deep comfort, surprising. It gave me the knowledge that whatever had happened the night before, and in the past, would finally be over once my bandages came off" (236). Marie indeed helps Lulu to "get [her] vision" as Lipsha testifies in the next chapter: "Insight. It was as though Lulu knew by looking at you what was the true bare-bone elements of your life. It wasn't like that before she had the operation on her eyes, but once the bandages came off she saw. She saw too clear for comfort" (241). Of course, it was not the operation that sharpened Lulu´s insight, but her newly-gained friendship with Marie (a friendship that was denied not only to Gilman´s isolated narrator, but also to several of Cisneros´s unhappy heroines).

These feelings of "female bonding and solidarity," Maria del Mar Gallego argues, "are aptly pictured by Lulu's first description of Marie employing mother-child images"[229] as she

[228] Julie Tharp, "Women´s Community and Survival in the Novels of Louise Erdrich," *Communication and Women´s Friendships: Parallels and Intersections in Literature and Life*, ed. by Janet Doubler Ward and Joanna Stephens Mink (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993) 167.

[229] Maria del Mar Gallego, "The Borders of the Self: Identity and Community in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands*, ed. Jesús Benito and Ana María Manzanas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 149.

is putting eye-drops into Lulu´s eyes: "She swayed down like a dim mountain, huge and blurred, the way a mother must look to her just born child" (236). As Sanders explains,

> Marie and Lulu give birth to a new relationship as they discover the strength and comfort available in a woman to woman connection. Their silent communication recalls the pre-symbolic language used between an infant and her mother. They communicate in a fundamentally feminine way as the symbolic wanes and the semiotic is strengthened. This connection, then, obliterates not only the patriarchal language, but also their antagonistic personal past.[230]

Once Lulu and Marie become allies, they become, as Gallego puts it, "powerful nurturing entities for their communities;"[231] in this way, the importance of female friendship for the welfare of the tribe is emphasized. As Tharp points out, for Native Americans, "female community signifies the life of the people, their survival in spirit as well as in body."[232] In their roles of Grandmothers, Tharp continues, they are able to mitigate the harmful influence of Western institutions: "Marie rejects the 'deadliness of the convent' in favor of life and Lulu remains mindful of the 'conflict between old values and the influences of the white standard of economic success.'"[233] Indeed, reflecting upon his grandmothers´ friendship, Lipsha reports to Gerry Nanapush that Lulu had "even testified for Chippewa claims and that people were starting to talk, now, about her knowledge as an old-time traditional" (268). As Tharp observes, "women's friendship here signifies tradition and resistance to acculturation;" what is more, "Lulu and Marie's friendship also reunites the characters with their own pasts."[234] "Since the traditionalist male figures - Old Man Pillager and Eli Kashpaw - have retreated into the bush and silence," Tharp continues, "it is left to the women in the novel to somehow save

[230] Sanders, 146.
[231] Gallego, 151.
[232] Tharp, 168.
[233] Tharp, 169.
[234] Tharp, 169.

the children."[235] Eventually, the character that "holds forth promise for a more powerful male presence" is their mutual grandson Lipsha, "an old people's child and a caregiver to the old ones on the reservation."[236] In this way, Tharp concludes, "female friendship enables the women in Erdrich's novels to recreate an empowering matrix that was frequently lost or disrupted through colonization and acculturation."[237]

To conclude, it has been demonstrated that in Louise Erdrich´s *Love Medicine*, the female characters are in most cases represented as the more powerful and successful ones. This centrality of women´s characters in the novel can be said to stem from their being perceived as the agents of a possible restoration, healing and further nurturing of their community shattered by colonization and forced cultural assimilation. The most prominent of these nourishing mother figures are Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Lamartine, who can be said to have formed and developed their autonomy and integrity in respect to the space they inhabit. Both of them are good housekeepers, keeping their places scrupulously neat and clean; it has been shown that especially for Marie, as for Chopin´s Calixta, performing household chores plays an important role in her appropriation of the space she lives in, which is, in turn, important to the building of her self-esteem. Both of them are sole rulers of their kingdoms: for Lulu, her house represents a sacred haven of her feminine power into which no man is ever allowed to enter; Marie shares her home with Nector; yet, she is the one who is actually in charge. In this respect, Erdrich´s heroines sharply differ from the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the plethora of Cisneros´s passive female characters whose living space is subjected to and constantly threatened by male authority. Symbolically, it is only after Marie and Lulu manage to cross the gulf that Nector Kashpaw created between them, and become allies that they are most helpful for their tribe.

[235] Tharp, 170.
[236] Tharp, 172.
[237] Tharp, 172.

6. Conclusion

As Marilyn R. Chandler argues, in American fiction "a house stands at stage center as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationships of the central characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world."[238] Indeed, as seen in the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sandra Cisneros, Kate Chopin and Louise Erdrich that have been analyzed in this thesis, space does not play the role of a mere setting. On the contrary, spatial imagery is intertwined with the internal and external situation of the heroines of these works. In Gilman´s "The Yellow Wallpaper," the ancestral house, garden, attic room and its furnishing, especially the wallpaper, are utilized to impress upon the reader the story´s narrator´s confinement, isolation and marginality within the structures of patriarchy. Similarly, in Cisneros´s *The House on Mango Street*, the image of the house stands both for the poverty and suffocating atmosphere of Esperanza´s neighborhood and for women´s victimization by male dominance. Chopin´s Edna Pontellier perceives her husband´s house as a symbol of his authority over her life. Clearly, for these women, domestic space represents a place of oppression subjugated to patriarchal control.

The heroines of "The Storm" and *Love Medicine*, however, recognize the space they inhabit as Gaston Bachelard´s *felicitous space*, the "eulogized space […] defended against adverse forces, the space we love."[239] In Chopin´s story, the spatial setting (the house, Calixta´s room, her bed and its color) reflects Calixta´s self-confidence and independence from the restrictions and aggression of patriarchy. In *Love Medicine*, the empowerment of the novel´s most prominent mother figures, Marie and Lulu, is associated with their intimate connection to their home, albeit ultimately a communal one. Clearly, the space these women

[238] Chandler, 1.
[239] Bachelard, xxxv.

inhabit is seen by them as a free and safe place conducive to a healthy development of their personality. In this way, the importance of having a space of one´s own is emphasized.

The significance of inhabiting a space that a woman could call her own is also acknowledged in the works describing women´s confinement. At the end of her story, Gilman´s narrator does not want to leave her room because after tearing down the wallpaper that for her represents the repressive patriarchal society, the room has finally become her own. Having gained a room of her own, she feels empowered, triumphantly walking over her husband´s unconscious body.[240] Rejecting the life in the barrio and refusing to follow the destiny of the women around her, Esperanza Cordero projects her dreams and hopes for a better future into a house of her own. Finally, in her quest for an independent identity, Edna Pontellier moves into the "pigeon house" and eventually walks into the limitless space of the ocean. The fact that the desire of these women for freedom and independence is expressed in spatial terms suggests that the significance of living in a space of one´s own is recognized by all the writers examined in this thesis.

Thus, it can be said that what these works have in common is their authors´ utilization of spatial settings as a mirror reflecting their heroines´ situation and the conviction that having a space of one´s own is essential to a beneficial development of a woman´s identity. This assumption is further corroborated by the recurrence of certain images, symbols and themes in these works. Gilman and Cisneros, for instance, use the same images - the attic room, garden and flowers – to convey women´s entrapment and seclusion. Furthermore, the issue of housekeeping appears in all of these works. Interestingly, for those women who feel comfortable at their homes (Calixta, Marie and Lulu), the performance of household chores and the possibility to arrange their living space in a way comfortable to them represent an

[240] Of course, the extent of her triumph is disputable, as has been already discussed in the chapter devoted to "The Yellow Wallpaper;" yet, this does not diminish the importance ascribed to having a room of one´s own in Gilman´s work.

important step on their path to the appropriation of their home, which is, in turn, essential for the development of their independent identity. For Gilman´s narrator and Edna Pontellier, on the other hand, the inability to take charge of their household may be seen as one of the reasons why their relationship to their living space is so distorted. For the women living on Mango Street, housework means nothing but drudgery. Accordingly, the symbols connected with housekeeping are treated differently in individual works: the linoleum, for example, reminds Esperanza´s friend Sally of her enclosed life within her husband´s house; in the case of Erdrich´s Marie, however, the linoleum is there to help her realize her own strength. Moreover, the issue of women´s sexuality is dealt with in all of these works: in Erdrich and Chopin, the assertion of women´s sexuality is connected with their self-assertion; in Gilman and Cisneros, however, female sexuality makes women vulnerable to male aggression. Once again, spatial settings is used to express this disparity: the bed in "The Yellow Wallpaper" stands for a woman´s sexual exploitation by men, while the white bed in "The Storm" reinforces Calixta´s position of a strong and independent woman fully in charge not only of her household, but more importantly, her body and sensuousness.

The works scrutinized in this thesis have been purposely chosen to represent a wide sample of women´s authors´ fiction. Thus, we have dealt with the 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" written by the white writer, social reformer and utopian feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935); attention has also been paid to two works composed by Kate Chopin (1850-1904), a writer of Irish and French Canadian descent interested in the description of the Cajun and Creole people in Louisiana – "The Storm" (1898) and *The Awakening* (1899); contemporary women fiction has been represented by Sandra Cisneros (b. 1954), a Mexican American writer born in Chicago, and Louise Erdrich (b. 1954), an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, who writes novels, poetry and children´s books featuring Native American characters and settings, and their works – *The*

House on Mango Street (1984) and *Love Medicine* (1984) respectively. To this list, other works in which the images of the house are employed as indices of their female characters´ circumstances may be added: for instance, Edith Wharton´s 1905 novel *The House of Mirth* (briefly dealt with in the introduction to this thesis), Willa Cather´s *The Professor´s House* (1925), Alice Walker´s *The Color Purple* (1982) or Toni Morrison´s *Beloved* (1987).

Considering the recurrence of the image of the house in all of these works, written by female authors from various social and cultural backgrounds in a time span of more than a hundred years, it may be suggested that women writers tend to view spatial settings as one of the essential aspects effecting the development of their female characters. Interestingly, it can be argued that the intimacy a woman feels towards her home, proclaimed already by Virginia Woolf, seems to remain intact even in the works of contemporary women writers; however, in the light of what has been discovered in this thesis, we may ask whether this concept does not appear to be more interesting and useful for ethnic rather than white writers nowadays. Finally, it may be concluded that in spite of a series of cultural, social, economical and legal changes that have taken place in the past decades, the dichotomy between domestic space as confinement and as *felicitous space* discovered in these works is still considered to be valid by contemporary women authors; quite contrary to what one would perhaps expect.

Of course, this area - the representation of space in literature written by women - constitutes a large field of interest in which a lot of research can still be done. One of the courses which one may pursue is interdisciplinary approach; it would be useful to compare the assumptions of literary criticism with the findings of psychology, sociology, geography or history. Furthermore, it might be helpful to devote one´s time to a more voluminous but maybe less detailed scrutiny of more works written by female authors. Finally, the comparison of the way living space is depicted in the works written by women authors and in the works composed by men could be interesting.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways selected American women writers utilize spatial imagery to convey their female characters´ internal and external situation. In the introductory, theoretical chapter, attention is at first paid to the representation of space in literature. Drawing upon Gaston Bachelard´s *Poetics of Space* and Marilyn R. Chandler´s *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction,* space is presented as playing a role equal to that of characters and plot since it is perceived as both a production shaped by its inhabitants and a force that is, in turn, shaping them. Furthermore, the difference between female and male spatial awareness as depicted in American fiction written both by men and women is scrutinized with the result that, arguably, male characters have a tendency to regard their houses as mere tokens of their social status, whereas female characters tend to have a more intimate and emotional relationship to their living space. This passage is inspired by Virginia Woolf´s *A Room of One´s Own*. Finally, it is argued that women characters tend to develop their personalities in respect to the space they inhabit, and that domestic space can be for them either a space of confinement (the section dealing with this phenomenon is based on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar´s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*) or a free and safe *felicitous space*.

The body of this thesis consists of a close analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman´s and Kate Chopin´s short stories "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and "The Storm" (1898), Louise Erdrich´s 1984 novel *Love Medicine* and Sandra Cisneros´s novella *The House on Mango Street* (1984). The comparison of these works, written by female writers from various cultural and social backgrounds in a time span of more than a century, enables us to suggest that spatial settings seem to play an important role in women writers´ conception of their female characters, no matter whether they write in the nineteenth or twentieth century. Nevertheless, considering the findings of this thesis, the question arises as to whether this notion is not more appealing and useful for ethnic rather than white writers nowadays. Finally, it may be inferred that in spite of a series of cultural, social, economical and legal changes that have occurred in the past decades the distinction between domestic space as entrapment and as *felicitous space*, discovered in the analyzed works, is (maybe surprisingly) still regarded as relevant even by contemporary women authors.

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá, jakým způsobem rozebírané americké autorky využívají prostor, který jejich hrdinky obývají, k tomu, aby zobrazily jejich vnitřní i vnější život. Úvodní teoretická kapitola si nejprve všímá toho, jak je prostor v literatuře vnímán a prezentován. V této části je čerpáno z knih *Poetics of Space* Gastona Bachelarda a *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* Marilyn R. Chandler a prostor je zde představen jako prvek literárního díla, který je stejně důležitý jako postavy a děj, protože prostor je vnímán nejen jako produkt utvářený těmi, kteří ho obývají, ale také jako síla, která ty, kdo v něm přebývají, utváří. Dále se tato práce věnuje rozdílům mezi ženským a mužským vnímáním prostoru. A to tak, jak bylo zachyceno v dílech ženských i mužských autorů. Z tohoto zkoumání vyplynulo, že zatímco muži považují své domy především za symboly svého sociálního postavení, ženy mají ke svým domovům mnohem intimnější a bližší vztah. Tato úvaha je inspirovaná esejí Virginie Woolfové *A Room of One´s Own*. Závěrem této kapitoly bylo předneseno tvrzení, že ženské postavy mají tendenci utvářet své osobnosti vzhledem k prostoru, ve kterém žijí, a že tento prostor pro ně může být buď žalářem (diskuze tohoto fenoménu je založena převážně na publikaci Sandry M. Gilbert a Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*) anebo svobodným a bezpečným „šťastným prostorem."

Hlavním těžištěm této práce je detailní rozbor povídek Charlotty Perkins Gilman a Kate Chopin „The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) a „The Storm" (1898), románu Louise Erdrich *Love Medicine* (1984) a novely Sandry Cisneros *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Závěr konstatuje, že ačkoli autorky pochází z různých sociálních a kulturních prostředí a svá díla napsaly s odstupem jednoho století, prostor všechny vnímají jako jeden z hlavních faktorů, určujících vývoj osobnosti jejich literárních hrdinek. Nicméně, zamyslíme-li se nad tím, co bylo v této práci odkryto, nabízí se otázka, zda tento koncept není v dnešní době atraktivnější a užitečnější spíše pro etnické autorky. Zajímavým zjištěním je i fakt, že navzdory společenským, kulturním, ekonomickým změnám, ke kterým došlo v posledních desetiletích, se zdá, že i pro současné autorky je stále relevantní dělení prostoru na omezující a stísněný anebo naopak svobodný a chráněný.